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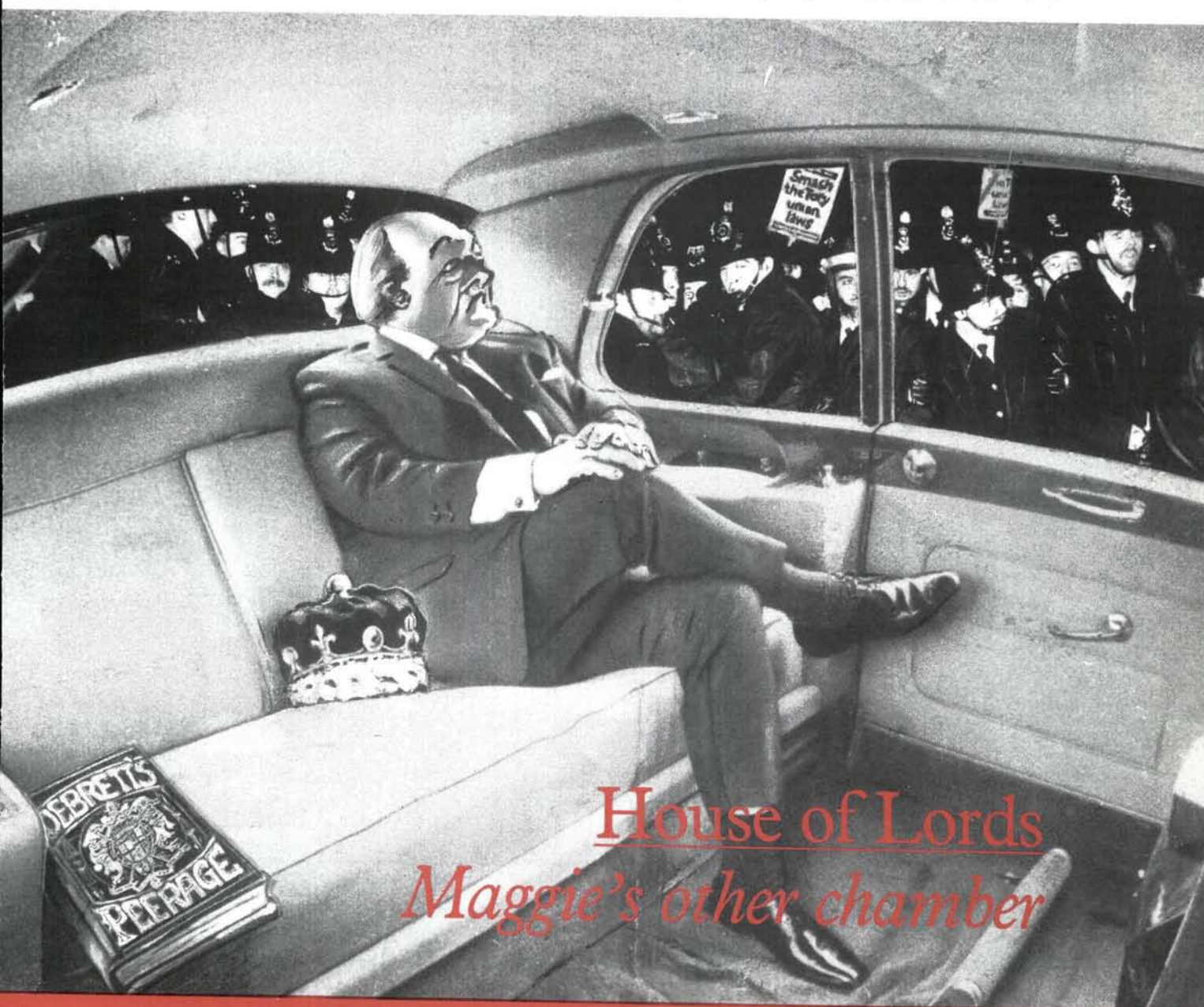

House of Lords
Maggie's other chamber

EVA FIGES: Women in paperback
NELL McCAFFERTY: Marriage Irish-style
JAMES CASTLE: Unnecessary deaths in the air

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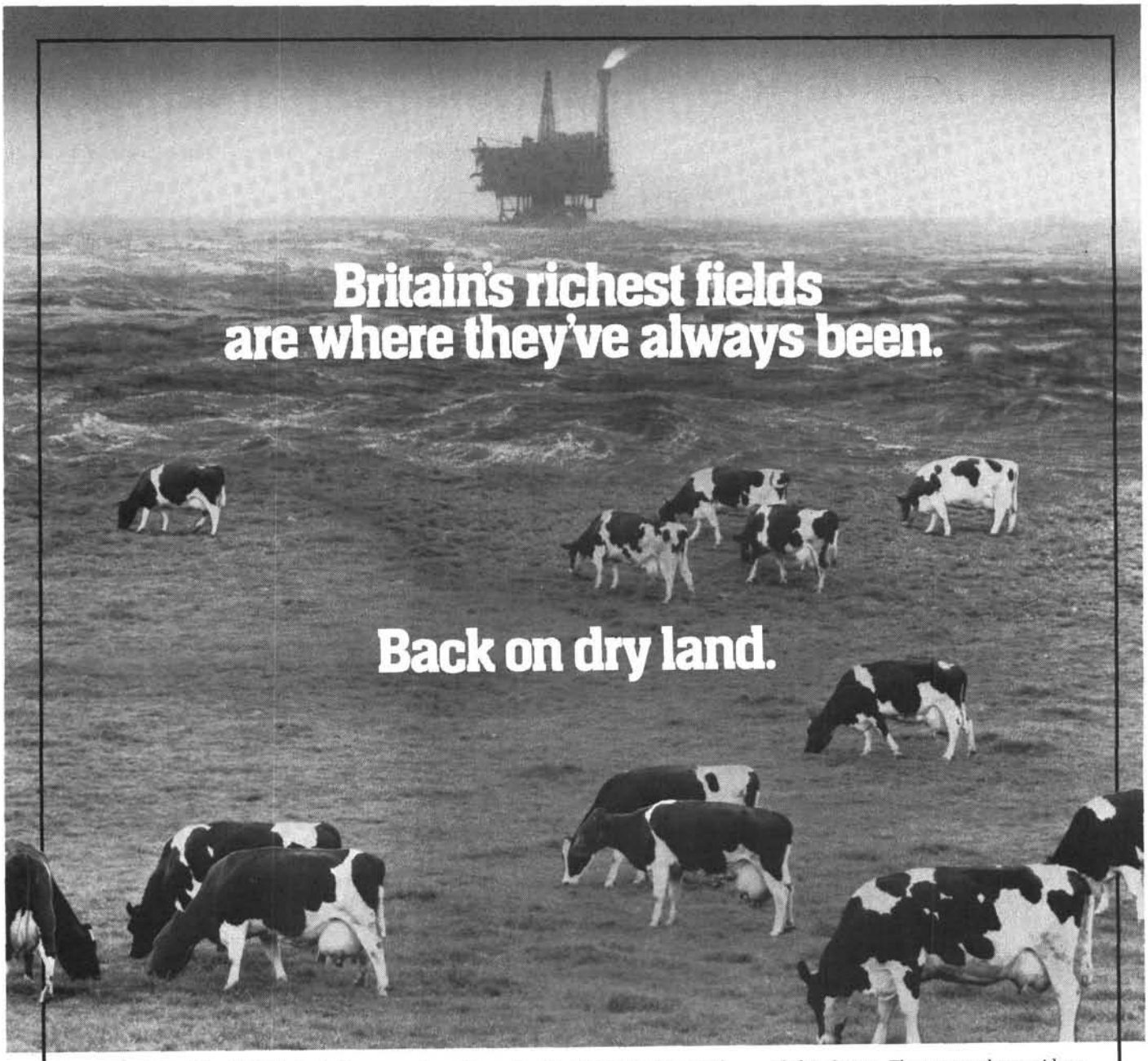

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New Statesman

Cover montage: Leon Kuhn

Lords in their heaven
Birth, loyal political service and stacks of money can get you into parliament's upper house. ANDREW ROTH reviews our democracy at work — or sleep 10

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LUNCHING WITH POETS

MIRON GRINDEA reports the goings-on at the Ninth World Congress of Poetry

BANG TO RIGHTS

JOHN FERNIE and STAN OPENSHAW have been looking into 'cover' of another sort, financial compensation which would — and wouldn't — be available in the case of a British Chernobyl

LORDS A' LEAPING

ANDREW ROTH continues his what's really what and who's really who in the House of Lords

New Statesman

Vol 112 No 2885 11 July 1986

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Sir Geoffrey sets off on his 'mission impossible'

IF IT WERE not all so serious, one could end up feeling sorry for Sir Geoffrey Howe. South Africa teeters on a line between bloody revolution and another ten years or more of white State repression that will make the last twenty years seem a picnic. But meanwhile Mrs Thatcher has cast Howe, against better judgement, in the role of the miracle peace-maker.

Sir Geoffrey did not want the mission for the very good reason that not even his genius as a waffle merchant can disguise that fact that there is now no place for the likes of him in the politics of Southern Africa. His function is simply to try to put a diplomatic figleaf over Mrs Thatcher's naked opposition to sanctions of any kind against South Africa. All the signs are that, even in this, he is failing.

The Howe refrain is that 'dialogue has to be better than bloodshed' as a way of making progress in South Africa. As a phrase for parrying pointed questions about the pointlessness of his journeyings, the words are no doubt useful. As a practical guide to what might be done in South Africa they have absolutely no meaning.

The bloodshed has begun. It will continue more or less until such time as the majority of the pepole of South Africa achieve political power by taking it from the whites. That may take five years, it may take another twenty-five, but the civil war has started and there will be one final outcome.

The African National Congress knows that, which is why none of its senior representatives wants to dignify the Howe mission with a meeting. Even the essentially right-wing Bishop Tutu knows that forces of revolution are on the move, which is why he decided to snub Howe by saying that meeting him would be a waste of his time. The notion that these forces will be stopped in their tracks, or even diverted a little from their path, if President Botha manages to find the time to meet Sir Geoffrey to be told that 'dialogue has to be a better way than bloodshed' in South Africa is just laughable.

The notion that Sir Geoffrey can by shuttle diplomacy provide the catalyst that will create the political chemistry in which 'meaningful dialogue' can take place is particularly absurd. If 'dialogue' could have solved the problem of South Africa, those directly involved would by now themselves have found some way of moving towards it. There is no dialogue because the white and the Black agenda in South Africa have no points at which they overlap.

What is more, the two political communities are on paths that are diverging ever more rapidly. The white backlash means that a white President has even less room for compromise and 'reform' now than any of his predecessors in the last quarter century. Mrs Thatcher is fond of reciting details of how apartheid is being dismantled as evidence of good faith on the part of the whites. The reality, however, is otherwise. The state of emergency this time has moved the entire country a massive step in the direction of becoming a totally repressive police state. Arrest without charge or trial and a complete muzzling of press, radio and television are not the hallmarks of a regime preparing for constructive dialogue with Howe or anyone else.

At the same time, the aspirations of the Black communities have moved far beyond the *reform* of apartheid. The Botha government has been trying, with some success, to drive a wedge between Chief Buthelezi and his Zulus on the one hand and the leadership of the

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ANC and the 'comrades' in the townships on the other. But none of them is going now to accept any outcome other than the ending of white minority rule in South Africa — an outcome which by definition is unacceptable to the present government.

Mrs Thatcher refuses to see this. Her instincts are in favour of white South Africa. 'If I were the odd one out, but I were right, it wouldn't matter, would it?' she said recently about sanctions. It wouldn't matter if she were any old MP. The tragedy is that she talks as if obstinately nailing our colours to the Botha mast. The result will be permanently lasting damage to British reputation and interests long after she *is* just another old MP. □

Cyprus 'spy' case makes bad law

IF THE AUTHORITATIVE leaks in this week's press turn in due course into announced government policy (will there be an official leak enquiry? answer 'No'), a significant change in the British jury system will be pushed through by this daily more anti-libertarian government. What is more it will be pushed through against the opinions of the government's own law officers by a daily more anti-libertarian Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd. It is the abolition of the right of those facing criminal charges before a jury to challenge and remove up to three jurors by the process of 'peremptory challenge' — that is without giving reason and simply because they don't like the look of them.

The government and the Home Secretary are here simply caving in to a prejudiced little campaign against jury challenge got up by a small group of Tory backbenchers, led by Toby Jessel. The case that has this small group all worked up was the acquittal last October of all the defendants in the notorious Cyprus 'spy' trial.

Two points need to be made about the proposal to change the law because of that trial. The first is that legislation is almost invariably bad legislation when it is rushed in without proper consideration on the basis of a single case. There is no evidence that the present system under which the defence in a criminal trial has the right of up to three peremptory challenges is leading to any significant or systematic perversion of the course of justice. If Hurd or Jessel have any such evidence or the results of any proper research, it would be nice if they could produce it for the rest of us to evaluate.

The second point is that jury challenge had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that all those in the Cyprus case got off. It is true that, as there were seven defendants in that case, the jury could have been challenged without reason 21 times and was indeed so challenged 12 times. Given the proclivity of trial judges in cases that touch in any way on 'national security' to say, in effect, that national security is whatever the prosecution on behalf of the government says it is, it is not surprising that the defence in such cases should look carefully at the jury in front of them.

But the Cyprus seven got off not because of a jury biased in their favour but because the prosecution fell to pieces in court. The military authorities were shown to have behaved disgracefully towards the accused in preparing the case. The Director of Public Prosecutions should have seen that the case was ludicrous and the Attorney General should never have authorised it to go ahead.

The whole episode serves merely to underline the case against the Home Office having any continuing responsibility for the administration of justice and its associated legislation. It is a department whose ethos is concerned with policing, custody and the restriction of rights. Legislation on how courts should conduct themselves and on the rights of the accused must pass as soon as possible to a new Ministry of Justice. □

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Greenpeace protest against Nevada US test April '86

Greenpeace

Nevada nuclear tests

THROWN IN THE AIR FOUR MILES FROM GROUND ZERO

A SHAKEN participant in one of the 'Back Country Actions' which try to delay and draw attention to the Nevada nuclear weapons tests has described for the *NS* how he got 45 miles into the site in 105-degree temperatures for the British test of 25 June. MIKE HOLDERNESS reports

SIX ANTI—NUCLEAR protestors were hurled in the air by the force of a British Nuclear Weapons test on Wednesday 25 June on Pahute Mesa, Nevada test site some 100 miles north-west of Las Vegas. The underground test, codenamed 'Darwin', was delayed by seven-and-a-half hours but went ahead despite the announced presence of the six protestors within the danger area. It was close to — if not over — the partial test-ban treaty limit of 150 kilotons explosive yield.

I spoke with Roy Young, one of the six who were just four miles from Ground Zero at the time of the blast, just after he was released on bail:

How did you get into the site?

'Six of us in all — four men and two women — walked in with backpacks on Monday. We spent three nights and two days getting 45 miles into the Nevada test site in 105-degree temperatures. It was a long haul, hot and very confusing, with no clear tracks.

'On Wednesday morning (when we expected the test at 6 am) the two women went onto Pahute Mesa, and reached a point 2½ miles from ground zero. They set off flares, lit a fire to make smoke, spread out a signal blanket — and still the Department of Energy's helicopter which was circling the area didn't see them. We spent the rest of the daytime hiding from the sun in canyons.'

What warning did you have of the test going off?

'We'd heard on the radio that the test had been postponed from 6 am to 7 am and then until at least 10 am. When it didn't happen even then we thought it'd been put off till the next day. So when it went off at about 1.30 pm the first we know of it was that the ground was leaping several feet up. Rocks avalanched in the canyon close to where I was . . . we thought we were all going to die.

'This was a very big test — 5.7 on the Richter scale. We were all about four miles from ground zero, and there the ground was shaking so much that it was impossible to stand up. Site workers later told us this test produced the biggest ground movement for years.'

What precautions were you able to take against the other effects of the test?

'We had half-face respirators with radiation filters, which we put on as soon as we felt the test. We were also carrying Geiger-Mueller radiation counters . . . we didn't register any unusual reading while we were on the site.'

How were you eventually found and arrested?

'At about 3 am the following morning one woman and one man walked directly to ground zero. There were technicians looking over the recording and evaluating the test — the two wandered around for about ten minutes before anyone noticed they were there. When they were arrested they told the Department of Energy security people where the rest of us were. A helicopter came over the canyon where we were and three men jumped out with guns levelled at us. They were quite professional. But it doesn't help to have someone point an M-16 at you.'

You clearly put yourself through a terrifyingly dangerous experience. Would you do it again?

'It was probably the hardest thing I've ever done. The desert was hard enough — having to carry enough water for four days, in 105-degree heat. Then it was terrifying just being that close to a nuclear explosion. But I feel we had no option but to do this — although we could easily have been killed and could have been exposed to radiation. We have to do this to oppose the nuclear arms race for our own survival, for everyone on the planet.'

As Young says, the ground shock caused by Darwin was reported (by the US Geological Service) as measuring 5.7 on the Richter scale.

To quote the nuclear tests site environmental impact statement of 1977: 'an event within the range of 20 kilotons to 200 kilotons yield will produce a signal between 4.8 and 5.7 . . .' the Department of Energy report that the test was carried out in an 1800 foot deep shaft in very hard volcanic rock, which produces a bigger ground shock than a blast in softer ground — but Darwin was certainly one of the largest recent US or British tests and very close to the 150-kiloton limit.

Anti-nuclear activists have known since mid-April that a test named Darwin was in preparation, and that three to four British representatives were involved with it. Five more tests are under preparation on the Nevada test site, they say: none of these has been identified as having a British connection.

Autonomous groups, with the support of the American Peace Test, plan further site invasions — referred to as 'Back Country Actions' — to delay and to dramatise the dangers of each of these future tests. A protest gathering at the site is planned for 4-6 August by the Franciscan-inspired Nevada Desert Experience. ●

'POWER TO THE PEOPLE'

Libs outflank Labour

THE LIBERALS in inner-city Tower Hamlets, having swept Labour out of power after 67 years, have begun a unique experiment in decentralisation.

They have devolved power onto seven neighbourhoods, each covering 11,000-25,000 electors and governed by those councillors elected there. They are responsible for almost all council functions except legal services, architects and central finance.

The Labour Party is left not knowing which side of its nose to look down. It has control of three of the seven Neighbourhood Committees. But its councillors will have to administer a Liberal budget, and in that respect their position in those neighbourhoods will be like that of Labour councils which are forced to administer Tory government cuts.

Neighbourhood budgets will be decided by a central Policy and Resources Committee, on which the party of proportional representation has awarded itself 11 of the 18 seats, despite holding only 25 of the 50 council seats (there are 24 Labour councillors and one SDP).

The local Labour Party attacks the plan on the grounds that it will increase council bureaucracy. But it's difficult to argue with the principle of decentralisation. At a by-election last week the unsuccessful Labour candidate was reduced to campaigning on a 'restore the mayor's chain' ticket, accusing the Liberals of insulting the traditions of London's East End.

In the recent past, Labour councils have produced some of the most creative experiments in local government (although Tower Hamlets hasn't led the field since the Poplar Revolt of 1919-25). For the Liberals, faced with the borough's desperate housing problems, decentralisation may be just a form of rearranging the deckchairs. But Labour can't afford to dismiss it, and it will be interesting to see if the policy delivers a less 'alienating' local state.

John Rentoul

'Power to the Hamlets'

Liberal manifesto for Tower Hamlets council elections May 1986

'The Labour Party looks on decentralisation as a fundamentally different thing from what it means to Liberals. To them it is providing local offices and local services; to us it is giving back power and control to the community.

People spend worrying, frustrating hours being fobbed off by one official after another. They are alienated from, and become hostile to, the system of government. Since high levels of expectation with regard to the local authority have been generated by decades of socialist "cradle to grave" dogma, the despair and hostility are amplified.'

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ROWS DEVASTATE TWO SCOTS LOCAL PARTIES

WITHIN THE LAST MONTH serious but separate crises in two local Labour parties in Scotland — Aberdeen and Midlothian — have prompted the sudden resignation or expulsion of four senior party officials. The fiercely-fought arguments — which are both likely to end up with Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) — illustrate all too clearly that Labour's local government old guard is as powerful and as reactionary as ever north of the border. ROB EDWARDS reports

IN ABERDEEN there's mounting pressure for the NEC to launch a major investigation into the operation of the minority Labour administration on the district council following the expulsion of one councillor from the Labour group, the abdication of another and the resignation of the district party secretary. One of the two main constituency parties in the city — Aberdeen South — recently passed a motion formally calling on the NEC to hold an inquiry.

The Labour party's current Scottish chairperson, Bob Middleton, is a member of that constituency party and the leader of the Labour group on Grampian region. This week he told the *New Statesman*: 'A full investigation into the relations between the district Labour party and the district Labour group is warranted.'

Controversy has arisen over two recent episodes — the disciplining of three Labour councillors last month and the abolition of the council's Women's Committee last week. Of the three councillors, one — Catherine Nikodem — was severely reprimanded for voting with the opposition. The second — David Clyne — was severely reprimanded for bringing the Labour party into disrepute, an allegation the details of which everyone is reluctant to discuss publicly in view of Clyne's announced intention of taking legal action.

The third councillor, Malcolm Savage, was expelled from the Labour group after he publicly attacked and voted against its decision to send two councillors on an industrial development mission to Gothenburg in Sweden at the same time as Aberdeen Football Club were playing a European cup match in the city. He points out that one of the councillors who went on the trip had been on three other council-funded trips to football matches in Europe in 1983. He is appealing against his expulsion to the NEC.

Senior party members say that there were inconsistencies and injustices in the operation and outcome of the disciplinary process. Such suggestions, however, are strongly rejected by Aberdeen's Labour group leader, councillor Robert Robertson, who says that the procedures adopted were in line with those recommended by the NEC. 'I'd welcome an investigation', he says, 'I think the Labour party in Aberdeen would benefit from it.'

The Scotsman

Sam Campbell — heartless of Midlothian

The council's more recent decision to abolish the two-year old Women's Committee caused Catherine Nikodem, the committee's convenor since its inception, to resign as a councillor. Along with the disciplinary action, it was also partially responsible for the sudden decision of the district party secretary, David Caldwell, to stand down.

Some party members allege that Labour councillors colluded with the Tories on the council to sink the Women's Committee, a policy committment which had been forced onto them by the district party in the first place. Councillor Robertson says this is 'absolute nonsense' and claims that the non-statutory Equal Opportunities Committee set up instead will fulfill precisely the same functions. Clearly not believing him, a non-party political action group aimed at re-establishing the Women's Committee was set up at a public meeting in Aberdeen on Monday.

In Midlothian, moves are now afoot to expel Councillor Sam Campbell, one of the most notorious figures in Scottish politics, from the Labour party. He has already resigned as convenor of Midlothian District Council and as secretary of the Labour group on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, following publicity given to his vitriolic attack on Catholics at a recent Orange Order rally in Edinburgh.

He urged Protestant ministers 'to stop fraternising with the enemy, with the Church of Rome' and protestants in general to withhold television licence fees until such 'mealy-mouthed Papists' as Terry Wogan and Eamonn Andrews are 'cleaned' off the screen. At the end of his speech, which was rapturously received, he led the assembled Orangepeople in a rousing rendition of 'Give me a home where there's no Pope of Rome . . .'

According to party activists, his future as a Labour councillor is now uncertain. 'He has committed the unforgivable sin', said one. 'He got caught'. ●

Bitter Oranges

THE SCOTTISH Orange Lodge has recently announced the formation of a Scottish Unionist Party, to oppose up to nine Scots Tory MPs in marginal seats, over the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The new party will not at present oppose the Labour Party, according to Orange Order secretary David Bryce. Details of the SUP's policies, other than one-issue opposition to the Dublin-London accords, may be announced at speeches during Scotland's Orange celebrations on 12 July.

For Orange eyes only, the June 1986 issue of the hard-to-obtain Orange Torch, *official organ of the Scottish Grand Lodge, contains an article by an 'independent contributor', whose proposals, if adopted, would make the SUPs real programme closely resemble that of the National Front or the BNP.*

The Torch*'s anonymous contributor offers a Charter for the 'Orange Order's Parliamentary Army'. Following the back to nature ecology orientation of the NF's 'Third Position' policy, he calls for a nuclear free Scotland - but with conventional military bases under NATO control.*

The Labour Party in Scotland is condemned as a Catholic front organisation and a cover for racial dilution by what the Torch calls 'Scoto-Eirish' immigrants. Foreigners who seek a vote, should offer themselves for repatriation. The guest worker policy of West Germany is offered as Scotland's perfect solution.

Quickly moving away from the traditional Orange obsession with religion, the Torch *piece declines into* Spearhead*'s Tyndall-speak. The Orange Lodge's independent contributor writes that 'the country is sick of the Open Door immigration policy fathered by the liberals, and supported by the Jews, priests and Scotland's coal, iron, steel and railway barons.' The Scottish Grand Lodge has apparently failed to notice that most of these were nationalised in 1945.*

Most of the ideas in the Torch *piece have already been twice aired in Glasgow at BNP-organised St Andrew's Day rallies. BNP leader John Tyndall is known to be increasingly concerned that his north of the border troops are drifting away from straight anti-Asian or West Indian racism and edging towards a strange combination of Scottish nationalism and Ulster loyalism. From the nature of the* Orange Torch *article, it seems as if the process is well advanced.*

Ian Sutherland

Cave: Public Order Bill

THE PUBLIC ORDER Bill begins its committee stage in the House of Lords next Thursday (17 July). The new powers to restrict demonstrations which it seeks to create reflect the government's inclination to treat deep seated conflicts in society as public order problems.

This tendency was surely never more apparent than in its treatment of the 'Stonehenge' convoy, action which could and should have been avoided if the local authorities had fulfilled their statutory duty to provide sites for travelling people under the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

The police stretched their public order powers to their limits and beyond to evict the travellers, dictate their routes and finally impound 90 per cent of their homes, forcing the convoy to disband. Ironically, when farmer Atwell's land was apparently damaged by travellers' vehicles camped illegally, police *inaction* gave the false impression that they were powerless to intervene.

Seeming to be unprotected by the criminal law, farmer Atwell's plight has fuelled the campaign by the National Farmers Union and Country Landowners Association to make trespass a criminal offence, thereby laying ramblers and birdwatchers open to prosecution. There will be further pressure by the landowning lobby in the Lords.

Sarah Spencer

The issues raised by the treatment of the convoy are examined in a forthcoming pamphlet Stonehenge *to be published by the National Council for Civil Liberties on 17 July. Available from NCCL, 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 4LA at £1.50 (plus 20p p&p).*

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Politics of Aids round-up (7): Julian Meldrum on disability laws

The British Medical Association (BMA), the doctors' union-cum-professional association, has launched an idea that deserves more attention than it has so far received. At its Annual Representative Meeting held last month in Scarborough the BMA voted by a narrow majority to seek new laws to protect people with Aids or at risk of it from discrimination in employment.

The thinking behind the BMA proposal is that a fear of loss of employment puts people off being tested for HIV (human immunodeficiency virus, formerly HTLV-3), the virus which causes Aids and a range of other, milder, conditions. (Strictly speaking, the tests are only for antibodies to HIV, but a confirmed positive result is assumed to show persistent infection.) It's widely held that HIV testing, providing it's done with informed consent before and counselling after the event, can help people at risk of Aids to reduce the risk for themselves and others — though there is of course another view: that advice is far more important than testing and that testing creates more problems than it's worth. What matters here is the case advanced by those who want more people to be tested.

How real is the threat of discrimination? Apart from a few sackings reported in the gay press, the most obvious moves have been in the insurance industry. BUPA, leading light in the private medical insurance business, now refuses to pay out for Aids-related illnesses that crop up in the first three years of any new policy. British insurance companies, coordinated by the Association of British Insurers, have decided that from this month all applicants for life assurance should be asked whether they have sought Aids-related advice or testing. Those who say 'yes' will have to prove that they are HIV 'negative' or have their applications deferred for some years (at best) or turned down.

These decisions threaten a process of creeping discrimination. From health insurance to employability. From life assurance to credit-worthiness and housing finance. Clearly, any antidiscrimination law worth considering must cover more than just employment, and in many other countries such laws already exist. In New South Wales, discrimination in employment or provision of services is unlawful on grounds including disability and homosexuality, and the latter prohibition has been invoked against Aids-related discrimination. Across the Atlantic, a Federal US law, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, bans discrimination against disabled people in any Federally-funded programme or activity. Disability is defined broadly, to cover any physical or mental impairment, no matter how it's caused.

Unfortunately, the American protection was undermined this June, where people with Aids are concerned, by a particularly cowardly ruling of the US Justice Department. The judgement was that in so far as people with Aids are physically or mentally disabled, they are indeed protected by the 1973 Act. *However*, employers are entitled to discriminate in order to protect others from infection, and it is for a person alleging discrimination to prove that he or she does *not* present a risk.

This position, against the advice of the Department's own lawyers, is painfully reminiscent of the way British judges have undermined employment protection and anti-discrimination laws — for example in the 1980 case of Saunders versus the Scottish National Camps Association. The Employment Appeals Tribunal agreed that an employer is entitled to sack a gay man on the basis of any widespread belief about homosexuality *whether or not that belief is justified.*

The US Supreme Court is shortly due to hear the case of a Florida schoolteacher with tuberculosis who has claimed the protection of the Rehabilitation Act, raising the issue of how far disability laws do cover communicable diseases. This may, or may not, override the Justice Department's equivocation. However many American states have laws protecting disabled people which are stronger than the Federal Act. Some, for example, cover 'suspected' disability. This means that people who are subject to discrimination do not need to prove that they *are* 'disabled' (or HIV infected) to qualify for protection. Some jurisdictions, including California, Washington DC, Wisconsin, New York State, San Francisco and the largely gay city of West Hollywood, have enacted specific measures to ban discrimination on the basis of antibody tests.

Which way now for the British Isles? The issue of health insurance is not as acute as in the USA, but the issue of employment is. The public health interest, if it exists at all, is arguably much greater. All the same, does it really make sense to have anti-discrimination laws on HIV infection, when we have none worth speaking of on disability? ●

MISCELLANY

No it isn't a raving vendetta but here, it has to be admitted, we go again

Little local difficulty

That'll teach shadow Environment Minister Jack Cunningham to be pro nuclear. Not only do the screaming Dave Sparts at the *NS* have a go at him, but British Nuclear Fuels, the biggest employer in his constituency, go and kick him in the teeth. Gordon Steele, Sellafield's director of reprocessing, told his workforce at a new Coal Board style briefing: 'The biggest threat to our work at Sellafield would be a change of government.' He has recanted, but local Labour Party members are worried that with his 1,837 majority Cunningham might not be in the next Parliament, let alone government.

PM's semiotics

As part of her fig leaf that she wants only 'constructive' means to resolve South Africa's crisis, Mrs T announced last week that the government will spend £15m on scholarships for black South Africans and to help the front line states with their communications problems. The scholarships would multiply the work already being done for black South Africans by the hard pressed British Council. At his press conference unveiling the Council's annual report on Tuesday the Director General, cautious Sir John Burgh, admitted his outfit hadn't been consulted before or informed since about this example of those 'gesture politics' Mrs T claims to detest.

Psst . . . state secret

And now we reveal another defence secret — the identity of Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding. Yes, Sir Peter is in charge of all those bits of the RAF that aren't stationed in Germany, a pretty big cheese (or grand formaggio as they say on the continent). Indeed he has occupied this post for some time, and in this capacity given numerous interviews, penned a series of articles, and been an all round personality. All this is news to the Ministry of Defence Press office RAF desk, who have just had Sir Peter's role explained to them by a humble *NS* staffer. If you want to ring them up and ask other tough questions, such as who is Margaret Thatcher, and when did General Belgrano leave the army, their number is 01-218 3255 — give it a whirl.

Quite unsuitable

You might also like to ring up Baroness Cox (01-219 3000) or henchman Tebbit (01-222 9000) to see if they can spell h-o-m-o-p-h-o-b-i-a. At last Saturday's 16th Lesbian & Gay Festival in London a WPC and a PC, who 'spoke to the man about his prejudices', stepped in to sort out the driver of one of the floats, an open-topped double-decker bus. Hired for £170 through London Crusador & Co (part of National Bus Co) by the monthly news-magazine Gay Times, *the bus was piloted by a cove who immediately declared himself shocked by the company he was supposed to be keeping. ('Odd', say London Crusador, 'his job-sheet ought to have told him in advance it was for the Lesbian & Gay Festival'). He put a card in his window reading 'This driver likes women' and eventually, at journey's end in Kennington, and no doubt only because he was excitedly waving his arms about, fetched* GT *ad manager Terry Deal a clip round the ear. Tory voter? H-o-m-o-p-h-o-b-i-a.*

Can overflowing

Oh come all ye faithful . . . yes it's a time for your best foot forward, and no backward glances, at the *Collection Can.* You've so far garnered a 6 per cent profit for Index on Censorship on our sell recommendation on Woolies, but hang in there. As brokers Scrimgeour Vickers point out, Dixon's have yet to sell off their stake, a couple of banks likewise, and Woolies hype is fading fast. So there's room for a bit more of a downward plunge . . . but sell out the moment stock starts to be unloaded by the institutions. As to the future, well everything looks a little black, the oil price is on the down, Gramm Rudman has put paid to US Ronnie's charms, so it's a sell — this time on Blue Circle, profits to SPAID, Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases. By the way that 6 per cent on Woolies takes us up to the 50 per cent profit mark on this great project of ours. When, and if, we make it to 100 per cent, an enormous party will be thrown in some appropriate setting (suggestions welcome).

Reptile

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SCRUTINY

Baron Marshall of the CEGB (recreations: origami, being interviewed by Terry Coleman in the *Guardian*). He and British Nuclear Fuels have ways of making you like nuclear power

UPP

THREE MILE ISLAND IN SOMERSET

IT COULDN'T happen here. But if it did, no one would know about it, at least not straightaway and not through official channels. Leaks of information are now nearly as common as leaks of radiation in the nuclear industry: TONY MEREDITH, researcher for Liberal MP Paddy Ashdown, pieces together the story of what happened two years ago at Hinkley 'A' power station, when operators nearly lost control of an emergency shutdown

OFFICIAL spokespersons confirm the shutdown on 6 September 1984, but don't say what else happened on that day. But our sources in the nuclear industry claim bad maintenance and wrong decisions took two reactors within a hair's breadth of losing all their cooling water.

Our sources claim that four mistakes were made. A faulty back-up generator for instrumentation power was left unrepaired for a week. The main power supply for boiler instrumentation then failed suddenly on 6 September, probably because of poor maintenance.

The automatic safety systems detected this failure and triggered an emergency shutdown of both reactors, but the danger was not over. A fire in the core of either reactor could have developed.

Power station boilers act like radiators, transferring heat from the circulating gas coolant to water until the thousands of tons of graphite, uranium and steel in the reactor core are gradually brought down to a safe temperature.

Because of the double power supply failure, the boilers were now showing very few instrument readings of what was happening. The situation started to go out of control. A crucial wrong decision seems to have been taken, closing the water supply valves. Starved of water, the main feed pumps blew up.

Despite the age of the equipment, the automatic safety systems again worked correctly, trying to switch on emergency water feed pumps for the boilers. The most damaging allegation is that how, at almost the last line of protection, there was such confusion that engineers were actually trying to shut down the emergency pumps.

If those operators had been more successful in their interference, two reactors at full operating temperature would have started to overheat. Well informed sources have compared the sequence of events at Hinkley with the chain of disaster at Three Mile Island in the US, when in 1979 the closing of water valves through human error damaged the reactor core.

The CEGB says the Hinkley shutdown was reported to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and to local representatives at the time, that it was 'thoroughly investigated', 'some errors in operation' were reported and appropriate action taken. There was 'never any question of reactor safety being at risk'.

Questions asked by Paddy Ashdown, in letters to the CEGB and Energy Minister Peter Walker, are likely to force out a more complete public statement on the incident. But the full report of the internal inquiry is, following normal CEGB practice, unlikely ever to see the light of day.

This is the fourth time in recent weeks that the CEGB has been contronted by detailed charges of operational failings at Hinkley Point, and the other three have proved correct.

- Magnox standpipes are corroded to the point that the Nuclear Insallations Inspectorate has given a November deadline for repair techniques to be developed, or the reactors will have to close.
- Cracks in standpipe liners of the newer 'B' station will cost £10 million to repair.
- And workers outside the Magnox reactor buildings have received excessive doses of radiation.

Every time the accuracy of these stories has had to be conceded, sooner or later, by officials. The PR image of a high-tech idyll has been punctured repeatedly, often by informed leaks from within the industry itself.

Many employees in the nuclear industry, and others who have recently retired, are deeply critical of their own senior management, personified by Lord Marshall. The public might be fooled by a smooth PR policy, but only the straight truth is going to satisfy those on the inside. Some of the most experienced are alarmed by current attitudes to safety, and have become convinced that management is only concerned to cover things up. As a result, a lot of information on incidents that have been concealed or misrepresented now seems to find its way to journalists and MPs. Any hopes of building a pressurised water reactor (PWR) at Hinkley Point are dwindling in the present atmosphere of distrust. ●

The PR job

Become a 'Friend of Sellafield'

PREVENTED from promoting itself on TV as cleaner than coal, British Nuclear Fuels has instead plumped for issuing 8 million invitations to come and play with geiger counters at Sellafield's off-site exhibition centre.

ITV rules won't allow BNFL to 'put the case' for (or Greenpeace the case against) nuclear energy, so BNFL's £2 million advertising campaign launched last week simply projects a new image of openness.

New BNFL chairperson Christopher Harding has also been busily consolidating the company's influence in the local community. Traditionally, the nuclear industry has derived much benefit from encouraging its employees to sit on local councils (*NS* 14 September 1985). But now that the future of re-processing is at stake, the gloves are off and the company is enticing key local professionals into its fold.

Newest recruits, according to the local paper *Whitehaven News*, are Roy Todd, assistant chief executive on Copeland Council and Alan Irving, chief reporter on the *News* itself. Both the *Whitehaven News* and Copeland council have been criticised by company supporters in the past for allowing the views of environmentalists to be heard.

Local planners and teachers have departed from public service into pastures nuclear — with disturbing results. In Whitehaven, St Benedict's secondary school chemistry department is threatened with closure because two of its teachers have joined the Sellafield 'brain drain'.

Harding's new 'open policy' extends beyond professional head-hunting and publicity hype into direct communication with the workforce through regular works meetings where employees are briefed on policy. The content of these briefings is far from anodyne. At a recent meeting, management revealed that a total of 700 faults, 'down to the last nut and bolt' had been found by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate in its safety audit of the B 205 part of the re-processing plant.

But loyalty from the 11,000 workers can't be taken for granted. Though they have been encouraged to rally behind the newly formed all-party 'Friends of Sellafield Society', only 200 members have signed up so far — and just 20 of them bothered to attend the Society's first general meeting in Seascale last week.

Ruth Balogh

Last week's Scrutiny on acid rain should have said the European Commission wants sulphur emissions cut by 60 per cent not to 60 per cent.

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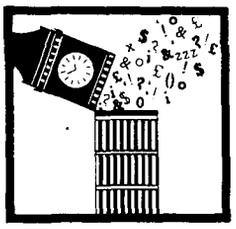

Revealed: how Labour will buy back BT — cost-free

HERE IS a summary of Labour Party policy on British Telecom prior to next week's discussion by the party's home policy committee on social ownership:

1. It is imperative to take back BT into full public ownership.
2. This will take a long time, but effective public control must be restored immediately.
3. Given the need to spend whatever money is going to reduce unemployment, an incoming Labour government won't pay anything out for BT.
4. There is no question of confiscating BT shares.
5. People who speculated on BT shares at the time of privatisation should not be allowed to make an easy profit by selling back to the state.
6. Shareholders (including BT workers) who are willing to invest for the longer term should be rewarded for their faith and enjoy their share of BT's success.
7. Whatever Labour does about BT must be acceptable to the electorate.
8. And to most Labour left-wingers.

Come on, admit it, you thought it couldn't be done, didn't you? You confidently predicted that Walworth Road would experience the nasty, grinding sound of circles failing to be squared; I certainly did.

The plain brown envelope that winged its way to me the other day with the final draft of *Social Ownership — A vision for the 1990s* still leaves some circles unsquared. But it goes further than anyone might have expected to align Labour's socialist objectives to the task both of winning votes and running a modern economy. Here, for the first time, are Labour's detailed plans for BT.

It will be a two-stage operation. The restoration of BT to full public ownership will not be immediate. According to the paper drawn up by John Smith, Labour's shadow industry secretary, and David Blunkett, leader of Sheffield City Council:

> In the first stage, Labour will make full use of the shares . . . already held by the government . . . In the case of BT, in which the government holds a 49 per cent stake, we will have, as the major shareholder, a substantial say in company decisions.

How this 'substantial say' will be exercised is not made clear, although the Smith-Blunkett paper contains a broad commitment to 'a strong interventionist approach' and ensuring 'industrial democracy and user representation at all levels'. We are not told, for example, whether a Labour government would use its 49 per cent stake to replace a majority of BT's main board members with its nominees.

That remains a gap in Labour's plans; but the central point is clear: BT will be restored to effective, if not complete, public control long before it is restored to public ownership.

The second stage will be to take back BT into 'social ownership'. As with other utilities, this will happen 'as soon as parliamentary time permits'. Translation: 'not for two or three years'.

STILL, prudent politicians prepare for many contingencies; and one of them is that Labour will win the 340 seats it would need to govern for a full term without being undermined by rebellions and by-election defeats. If that exquisite state of affairs is reached, and a BT (Social Ownership) Bill is laid before Parliament, what will it contain?

The Smith-Blunkett paper says that

PETER KELLNER

'Labour will legislate to require all BT shareholders to exchange their voting shares for new non-voting securities'. These securities 'will be issued by BT itself'. That means the exercise won't cost the government anything; shareholders will simply exchange one kind of BT share certificate for another.

Actually, it is not strictly true that the exercise will be free. Anyone who does not wish to acquire the new 'BT bonds' will be able to sell their shares back to the government — but for only the 130p a share flotation price. But is clear from the Smith-Blunkett paper that the 'BT bond' alternative will be pitched sufficiently attractively for few people to choose the cash alternative.

The BT bonds 'may be of different types and classes, depending on the requirements of different kinds of investor and market conditions at the time'. However, 'all the new securities will be fully marketable'. The two main kinds of bond envisaged are:

- Capital bonds, designed mainly for individual shareholders. 'These securities will be similar to National Savings Certificates, their price increasing gradually, through time'.
- Income bonds, mainly for institutions such as pension funds. With these, the income 'is steady in the first few years and then increases thereafter: such securities are akin to so-called "deep discount" bonds'.

According to the paper, 'Labour will increase the options open to pension fund managers, whilst making sure that speculators go unrewarded . . . Labour wishes to encourage . . . long-term investment in socially owned industries — we therefore propose to offer those shareholders who are prepared to reaffirm their long-term commitment to BT acknowledgement of that commitment. For those who are not prepared to make that commitment we will offer no more than the original flotation price'.

Easier said than done. If the BT bonds in their various forms are attractive to long-term investors, *and* they are 'fully marketable', then it is impossible to penalise speculators effectively. For the *present* price of such bonds will reflect their *future* potential. That, after all, is the most fundamental rule governing stock market prices. Intelligent shareholders who want to get out of BT would agree to take their share of the bonds — and then sell them as soon as trading begins.

The only way to penalise the 'speculator' and reward the 'investor' is to bend the rule that 'all the new securities will be fully marketable'. One way, ironically, would be to take a leaf out of the Tories' book from when they privatised BT and make a bonus issue of, say, one free bond for every ten held by investors who are original bond-holders and keep their bonds for at least three years.

THIS GRUBBY DETAIL seems a long way from elevated talk of 'social ownership' as 'a vision for the 1990s'. But for four decades — ever since Emmanuel Shinwell became Minister for Fuel and Power in 1945 and found that nobody had the faintest idea how to implement Labour's manifesto commitment to nationalise the coal mines — the party's radical edge has been blunted by a failure to translate grand objectives into precise, feasible measures.

Almost anyone reading the Smith-Blunkett paper is bound to have reservations. Its over-riding quality, however, is that it sets out a destination for Labour's industrial policy, and a route-map for getting there.

This makes it a dangerous document. It is dangerous to Labour's far Left because anyone who wants to bang on about nationalising the 'top 200 monopolies', and accuse Smith and Blunkett of betraying Clause Four, must now engage in the kind of detailed argument that many on the Left prefer to avoid. And it is dangerous to the Labour Right whose traditional view of radical policies designed in opposition is: 'don't worry: harmless nonsense: won't happen: have another drink'.

Next time, making the mammoth assumption that there will be a Labour government with a secure majority, the Right will be unable to plead impracticality as an excuse for inactivity. If the Left has any sense, it will support the Smith-Blunkett paper, rather than carp at its theology. □

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LORDS A' LEAPING

MRS THATCHER'S OTHER CHAMBER

The membership, powers and procedures of the House of Lords are a complete constitutional anachronism. For years the only disagreement was whether it should be reformed or abolished. Under this government the anachronism has taken on a new lease of political life. ANDREW ROTH describes how it works

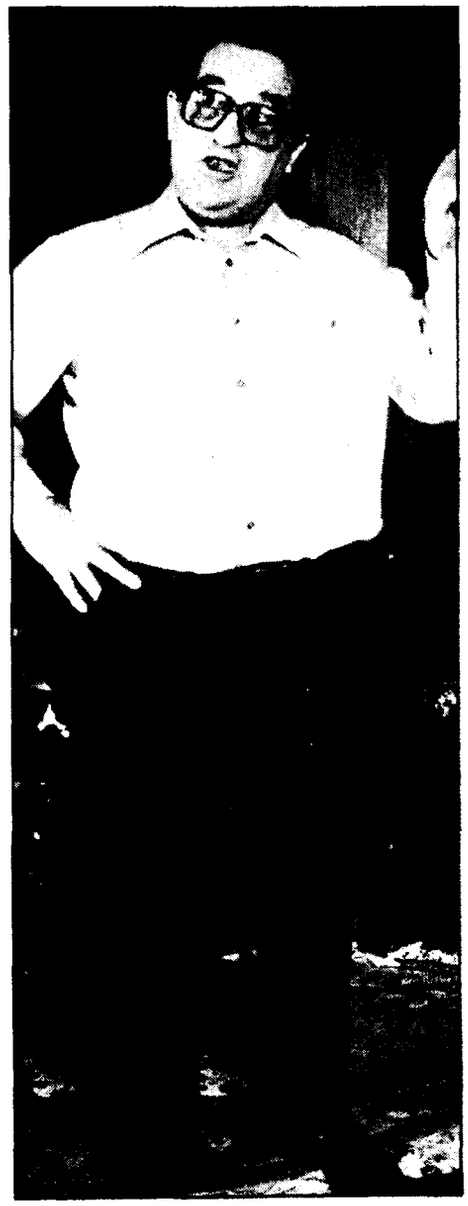
BRITISH PEERS are a deceptive lot, as Ken Livingstone found when he predicted they could be persuaded to save the GLC. The Lords are like a series of countermarching stage armies.

Shuffling across our midnight TV screens, they can seem like a geriatric clinic for ex-MPs, stiffened by a scattering of younger hereditary peers, actually capable of reading civil servants' briefs, plus retired professionals sitting as 'independent' cross-benchers.

If there is a chance to chastise salmon poachers or control red deer, Scots peers rush down from their estates, converting the upper chamber into the House of Lairds. If caning or education cuts are on the agenda, retired Vice Chancellors totter in by the dozen. It is only when there is a full-blooded confrontation — like over the continued power of municipal socialism — that the reserve battalion of Tory millionaire peers turns up in full strength.

A Conservative government can be defeated occasionally in the Lords on specialised injustices, which grab the lapels of retired barristers or judges or even accountants. The biggest revolt in 1980 was over paying for rural buses serving Church schools.

The basic power of Conservatism in the Lords, though, has been demonstrated recently by the inability of a united Opposition even to dent the Gas Bill, designed to transform a public service into a private profit making monopoly, while providing the government with £7-£9 billion for tax cuts to improve its chances in the next general election. Lord ('Jack') Diamond's laboured indignation seemed to bludgeon cross-benchers into inactivity.


Camera Press

(Right) Lord Kagan 'uses the Lords as a prestigious club'. (Above, from left to right) Eton-educated, Brighton bus driver and Ridley front-man, Lord Teviot; Lord Barber, as Chairman of Standard Chartered, he hardly needs his £38 a day allowance; Hugh 'I used to be a Communist, now I'm a Lord' Scanlon; Earl of Lauderdale, better known as Father of Woman for Defence; the talented Lord Belstead was rewarded with Ag & Fish; Len Murray — joined the bosses

Only on relatively rare, but overly publicised, occasions — between six and a dozen times a year — can their Lordships live up to their claim to be a revising chamber by kicking a Tory government lightly in the shins. This happened three times on the recent Social Security Bill.

Such rebellions succeed only if there is a coincidence of at least two of three factors: first, that normally inactive cross-benchers attend and vote disproportionately against the government, instead of splitting evenly as is their wont; second, that the vote takes place early in the day, before the full weight of the part-time 'City' peers can be thrown in; third, that there is a split in the overwhelming Tory ranks. This is required because the 400 plus who take the Tory whip are more than twice as numerous as the 200 in the Opposition (120 Labour, 40 each for Liberals and SDP). Up to a quarter of each group is too ill, too old or too gaga to attend — despite the heroic examples of ailing Lords Brockway, Boothby and Stockton.

Thus on 30 June, at 4.17pm, the government was defeated on the Liberal Lord Wigoder's amendment calling for an appeal board for rejected social security claims — by 131 votes to 115. Labour contributed 67 votes to the winning side, the Liberals and SDP 18 each, the cross-benchers 26 (including 2 Bishops), plus two votes from rebel Tories — Baroness Faithfull, former Director of Oxford Social Services, and the Earl of Lauderdale, Lady Olga Maitland's normally crusty right-wing ex-journalist father, Patrick.

This alliance temporarily overwhelmed the Tories' 109 votes, plus six cross-brenchers. But an hour later, with over a dozen reinforcements then in from their day in the City and with eight fewer cross-benchers voting with the Opposition, the government was able to fight off a similarly reformist amendment by another Liberal, Lord Banks, urging grants rather than loans for the needy.

IT IS SOMETIMES difficult to be precise about an oscillating legislature normally sustained by under 200 self-selected active peers of the over 800 who sign on for a session, out of the total of 1,200 entitled to be 'legislators'. Harried Whips do not know which unsalaried peers are in the Palace of Westminster willing to vote, much less which are physically or temperamentally inclined to make the journey, even with 28.4p a mile travel allowance, £47 a night for an overnight hotel stay for out-of-towners and a daily expenses allowance of £38 (including secretarial help).

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David Fowler

Even the bonhomie of the relatively well-disposed Tory Chief Whip, Lord ('Bertie') Denham, can turn choleric if some of his charges have not altered their visits to their other clubs or Harrods to suit the Whips' demands. Of course, the score of tax exiles, including the Paris-based multimillionaire oil-and-newspaper tycoon, Viscount Rothermere, do not sign on. Nor do the dozens who have settled broad, including the half dozen who live in South Africa, like the phobic ex-Rhodesian rightist, the Duke of Montrose, who believed the Beatles were part of a worldwide Communist destabilisation plan.

Of those qualified to take part, annual attendances vary between none and 150 or so. Between 20 and 30 turn up frequently, for fifteen minutes or so at Question Time, to qualify to collect their day's expenses — a 'signing on' ritual for upper crust supplementary benefit. A similar number, including the Wilson-elevated convicted fraudster, Lord Kagan, use the Lords as their prestigious club, sure to impress clients invited to drink or a meal. These rarely speak or vote, but remain an unpredictable calculation for Whips.

Ordinary political trench warfare in the House of Lords goes on between roughly 120 Tory peers and about 80 Opposition lords — some 50 of them Labour, some 15 each Liberal and SDP. These include regulars like the sharp-tongued right-wing Tory ex-Minister, Lord ('Springheel Jack') Boyd-Carpenter, who has continually honed his aggressive speaking technique since he was President of the Oxford Union in 1930.

In the lightly disciplined Lords, some ex-MPs wallow in the verbal ego trips they were unable to indulge in the Commons. Tory Harmar-Nicholls sometimes verbalises endlessly to avoid an early vote, enabling City peers to arrive. Labour's ('Bill') Molloy soars to verbal fantasy, underlining the danger of mixing Irish blood with a Welsh upbringing.

About two dozen attending cross-benchers usually cancel each other out by dividing evenly on most issues. Increasingly, these day-to-day exchanges are dominated by life peers, mostly in their sixties, seventies and eighties. Hereditary peers though, still play a substantial role on the Conservative side. If moderately able but without moneymaking talents, they become Whips. If very talented — say Belstead, Elton, Trefgarne and formerly Gowrie — they become junior Ministers.

If money-talented they are attracted to the City. There are, of course, some key hereditaries on Opposition benches. Lord (Tom) Ponsonby, Labour's Chief Whip, is the great grandson of Queen Victoria's Private Secretary. Lord Shepherd, Labour's former Leader, is the son of its pre-war National Agent, elevated in 1946 by Clement Attlee to become Labour's Chief Whip in the Lords. Attlee's own son, who inherited his Earldom after having been sacked by British Rail as a junior press spokesman, now maunders for the SDP.

ALTHOUGH THE BASIC battle line is political, both sides are interlaced by special interests. The Conservatives in the Lords speak for the nation's largest landowners — beginning with the Duke of Buccleuch, who owns 277,000 acres. Crippled by a riding accident, he also speaks for the disabled. About a quarter of the owners of the finest stately homes and largest landholdings are represented: Bath (Longleat and 9,500 acres), Bathhurst (14,500), Salisbury (Hatfield House and 20,000 acres, formerly 50,000 in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe), Seafield (185,000 in Banffshire).

In the evening, and more particularly in a crisis, the part-time representatives of the nation's and the world's largest firms beef up the retired full-time political professionals: Airlie (ex-chairman of Schroders, the merchant bank and the Queen's Lord Chamberlain), Aldington (ex-Sun Alliance, Grindlays, Port of London Authority, Westland and GEC), Ashburton (ex-Baring Brothers managing director), Ashcombe (Cubitt chairman), Atholl (Westminster Press chairman — a Cowdray on his mother's side), Balfour of Burleigh (Tarmac), Barber (Standard Chartered chairman), Bearsted (ex-Hill Samuel chairman), Blakenham (chairman of Pearsons and the *Financial Times*), Boardman (National Westminster chairman), Boyd-Carpenter (ex-Rugby Portland Cement chairman), Caldecote (Lloyds Bank, Consolidated Goldfields), Camrose (ex-*Daily Telegraph* deputy chairman), Carr (ex-Prudential chairman, Metal Box), Carrick (Ralli Brothers), Carrington (ex-GEC chairman), Catto (Morgan Grenfell chairman), Chalfont (IBM), Shawcross (Morgan Guarantee, Hawker-Siddeley), Forte (THF), Weinstock (GEC).

Labour has its contingent: is ex-Leader, 'Eddie' Shackleton, was a longtime top RTZ board member, recently retired; his successor, Shepherd, was Chairman of National Bus and is Deputy Chairman of the Sterling Group, founded by the late Rudi Sternberg (elevated to Lord Plurenden after helping finance Harold Wilson's office in Opposition); current Leader, Cledwyn, is a Director of Anglesey Aluminium and was on the board of Shell UK 1980-84; Labour's shining new recruit, Williams of Elvel, was a Managing Director of Baring Brothers, then Henry Ansbacher.

Despite ('Len') Murray's recent arrival, trade unionists are inadequately represented, little helped by Mrs Thatcher's efforts in elevating right-wingers like ('Frank') Chapple and ('Bob') Mellish to represent the EETPU and old Transport & General Workers Union. Jack Jones refused to be 'kicked upstairs' to the Lords. Although ex-Communist Hugh Scanlon surprised many by agreeing to his peerage, his attendance has been scanty, even when AUEW interests are at stake.

Even when the millionaire controllers of billions do not come in to vote directly in defence of their interests, the power of money can be seen to pulse through the chamber as peers make speeches from badly-read briefs from the lobby they favour or present obscure legalistic amendments to legislation. This week the Law Society has been briefing against the building societies taking over their solicitors' monopoly of property conveyancing.

A minority declare their interest, usually vaguely, as did Labour's Lord Northfield when he spoke recently on behalf of the patent rights of an unmentioned US pharmaceutical company, Merck Sharp and Dohme. Only occasionally does it surface fully, as with Lord Teviot, an Eton-educated Brighton bus driver when he inherited his title without any money. During his £120-a-day work with transport professionals to make Nicholas Ridley's bus-destroying Transport Bill workable, he introduced scores of vital amendments. At one moment he proudly claimed one single amendment being put forward by him as being his very own unsolicited creation — making it clear the rest were not. □

Training/ Education/ Conference Facilities

Harlow Council has recently acquired a 77,000 sq.ft. former Comprehensive School which it intends to develop as a training and employment centre.

We are interested in hearing from organisations, such as trades unions, who may be looking for occasional or permanent space. The buildings are strategically located for the South East, 2 miles from Junction 7 on the M.11 and 6 miles from the M.11/M.25 junction.

Further details from Bob Bradley, Planning and Employment Division, Harlow Council. Telephone: Harlow (0279) 446031.

HARLOW

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AP

Keiko Kawakami was one of four survivors when a Boeing 747 crashed in Japan. More might have survived with safer seats

DEADLY DESIGNS

Human bodies can survive some crashes better than an aeroplane. So why don't they? JAMES CASTLE reports

WHEN YOU NEXT travel by air there is something I want you to do. I would like you to think about your seating position. You are sitting in a seat which faces the front of the aircraft. Now how would you like to sit in a seat which faces toward the rear of your transport? Oh no, you might say, I want to see where I'm going and anyway it's much more natural facing into the direction of travel.

What's 'natural' about sitting in a metal tube at 40,000 feet doing 600 mph eating last year's reconstituted plastic masquerading as boeuf bourguignon?

The truth is that the airlines, their engineers and the aviation regulating authorities all know that rearward facing seats would greatly enhance onboard safety. If you plummet to the ground from 11,000 feet and hit it at 500 mph or fly into the side of a Spanish mountain it is true to say it makes little difference which way you are sitting. But in a survivable accident your chances are significantly improved by facing backwards.

Here is why. In the unlikely event, as they say, of the aircraft having to make a crash landing and presuming the hull remains more or less intact, your rear facing seat will support your entire body evenly and minimise whiplash injury. Once the aircraft has stopped you have to get out fast and your chances of success are highest if you are clearheaded and uninjured.

Many of the victims in a survivable accident are either burned or suffocated to death after failing to escape, some time after the 90-second evacuation period has lapsed. In the forward facing seat, your head will have been jammed against the seat in front. On the first impact your abdomen will have suffered some trauma (it has been known for the lap seat belt almost to cut a passenger in two), your head will have changed position and the second impact (in crash landings there are nearly always at least two heavy impacts) will undoubtedly fling your head against the seat back, the metal meal tray or arm rests — if this doesn't kill you, you will observe that the hat racks will be disgorging their contents and duty-frees will take a more menacing role as missiles. Seats may begin to break away from their mountings and concertina into each other — unable to take the combined stresses of the occupant and the weight from behind which multiplies massively as it is subjected to wildly oscillating G-forces — the immense tug of gravity.

The aircraft stops. Well, you are not absolutely sure as your head is spinning, assuming that you are still conscious. The real business of escape can begin. The aircraft is at a crazy angle and the cabin is beginning to fill with black, acrid smoke. You can no longer hear the instructions. You try to move but your feet are stuck.

Not looking good is it?

THERE HAS BEEN no serious discussion about seat position with the public by the aviation industry. According to British Airways: 'It's not particularly popular among passengers to have seats facing to the rear'. How do they know? Have they carried out a survey? 'No, not since we merged in 1973 — I cannot say what our predecessors may have done'.

In 1947, when the United States Army Air Force analysed questionnaires from 1,020 passengers who had travelled in their rearward facing seats on transcontinental flights, they found that people were overwhelmingly in favour of the change.

One reason that surveys have never been undertaken is that any discussion concerning safety in the air, even if only implicit, is a taboo subject. Most airlines consider that asking passengers to think about safety is alarmist. Nor can they use the results in promotion. Most airlines belong to the International Air Travel Association (IATA) — the air operators' trade association — whose members have agreed among themselves not to use safety and safety records in their promotion.

The consequent secrecy has the very nasty side effect of protecting some airlines with dubious safety standards from well deserved financial catastrophe.

But back to the backward facing seats. No one argues they are not safer. Officially, the Civil Aviation Authority, which regulates the airworthiness of British aircraft, once agreed. The CAA publishes the British Civil Aviation Requirements (BCARs), the bible of civil aviation to which all British aircraft have to conform. Under 'Design and Construction of Seats' in section D it states:

> To avoid as far as possible the risk of injury to occupants under emergency and minor crash conditions, it is recommended that, where practicable, seats should be aft-facing.

(In fact, this whole section has been superseded for new types of aircraft to be certificated after July 1979. The new European Joint Airworthiness Requirements make no mention of seat position. An example of international blandness and compromise?).

But most plane types were certificated before 1979, so why the resistance to changing the seats around? A common argument is that it would increase operating costs because the seats would be heavier. The United States Air Force designed an aft-facing seat able to withstand 16 g using modern materials and design techniques to replace a forward facing seat rated at 6.5 g. It turned out 15 lbs *lighter*!

There is no doubt that the improved 'crashworthiness' of seats can be achieved without economic or performance loss if the design is considered early in the development of a new aircraft. But if conventional materials are used to modify existing aircraft the weight *would* rise by an estimated 20 per cent.

So let's get rid of some non-essential equipment — the in-flight movie equipment (who wants to watch a bad print *Rocky IV* — twice — anyway) and the inflammable and breakable duty-frees carried by both airline and passengers.

In March this year, a report by the National Consumer Council entitled 'Air Transport and the Consumer' found that: 'The practice of passengers carrying duty-free purchases on aircraft, and in the passenger cabin, is both uneconomic and dangerous . . . Most duty-free purchases could be made at the airport of arrival with loss of consumer benefit, but with a considerable increase in comfort and safety'.

The real reason for this resistance to change is almost certainly the belief that the first airline to take action stands a good chance of losing popularity and business unless it can explain the change to passengers. But this is against that company practice of not advertising safety or even drawing it to passengers' attention.

The airlines could agree to do it together. But that would raise a big public question. Why was this not done 30 years ago with the

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advent of the new jet age?

Highly embarrassing when you consider the recommendation following the aforementioned 1947 passenger survey was to 'include in specification for future transport aircraft the principle of rear facing seats'. The military, with much Second World War experience fresh in their minds, were more direct: 'If the rearward facing seating principle is disregarded, these passengers will die.' It was and they have.

The CAA should enforce this change but they say that have not got enough 'operational experience' on the matter although they are aware that the military are convinced they are safer. Since 1947, all RAF passenger planes have had rearward facing seats. Despite its BCAR recommendation, the CAA says it has an 'open mind' on the issue: 'It hasn't been proven that rear facing seats are any safer than forward facing. We reckon that in 1 per cent of survivable accidents rear facing seats would have helped.'

They are quite right — it is not proven because the authority have never carried out any surveys or research on seats and survival; and dead men, women and children tell no tales. Their figure of 1 per cent does not even justify the dignity of discussion. No research — no statistics.

Yet there is a small mountain of research literature in the CAA's possession on cabin designs that increase the chances of survival in an accident. Much of it is produced by American authorities, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), NASA, the National Transportation Safety Board and their related research connections.

In summary, research into existing design (and thus forward facing seats) shows:

- The minimum design criteria, including human body tolerances before serious injury or fatality occur, are far too low. Medical research and experience has found that the body can take far higher G-forces than it is given credit for;
- Seats and furnishings not only kill and maim but then become obstacles and trap occupants;
- Static testing is inadequate to prove system behaviour under dynamic conditions and takes no account of warping or buckling of fuselage or floor;
- Padding of aircraft interiors is insufficient to prevent injuries, particularly to the head;
- The regulations and standards governing crashworthiness of cabin furnishings have not been upgraded for over 30 years.

Or as Richard Snyder summarised in his 1983 paper, 'Civil Aircraft Restraint Systems': 'Civil aircraft restraint standards and test requirements are below comparable requirements for automobiles, capable military aircraft . . . and far below the state of the art technology.' As the flexible human being can withstand a higher G-force than an aircraft we are left with the sour FAA observation: 'We have 40 g people riding in 20 g airplanes and sitting in 9 g seat and restraint systems'.

THE TIME HAS come to admit the failure to act on this issue, to inform and re-educate the public and to embark collectively on this change. We need a revolution in the cabins of our jets and it is already too late to be bloodless.

If finance is needed, substantial savings could be made in other areas of operation. Marketing, for instance, where there is the ludicrous situation of national 'flag-carriers' being in near-monopoly situations on their routes and yet still finding it necessary to spend a fortune on advertising and publicity. If British Airways would really like to live up to their boast of 'Putting people first', then they could spend some of their £66,900,000 (1984) promotional budget on the passengers' safety (Profits to 31 March this year: £181,000,000).

So — happy flying. I won't be with you — too frightened, and I should know. □

James Castle is a former CAA-licensed airline engineer.

CENSORSHIP

SHOCK! LABOUR BANS FILM

Are feminists the new Stalinists? As the conflict over pornography hots up, PAUL MILES speaks out

Brighton

IN MAY OF this year, the Labour Party took control of Brighton for the first time in the town's history. Clearly committed to the advancement of the position of women, one of the first acts of the new administration was to set up a Women's Committee. Just a few days later, the film *9½ Weeks*, which deals with a woman's fantasy of rape, was banned by the council's Film Viewing Working Party, following protests from women's groups.

Brighton is the only town in the country to take this action. Now its residents will either have to go to neighbouring Hove or to one of the private clubs to see this film.

Nevertheless, there seems to be growing support on the Left for a censorial approach to misrepresentations of female sexuality. The old adage that what America is doing today Britain will do tomorrow is proving to be true once again. In the US, mildly pornographic publications like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* have been banned from half the country's newsagents, including major chains. Over here Clare Short has achieved a certain notoriety in her attempt to outlaw virtually naked women from daily newspapers. An informal alliance seems to be developing between traditional moralists and radical feminists. The result is causing genuine horror in people who can remember (and who were active in) the controversies surrounding the issue of censorship in the 1960s.

What has happened to left-wing thought in the intervening years? How can that *cause célèbre, Lady Chatterley's Lover*, now come to read, according to Kate Millett, in her classic *Sexual Politics*, like Lawrence's 'sadistic insistence on inherent female masochism'? Presumably, if they had any say in the matter, it would not now get past the Brighton censors.

Since the 1960s, women have come to formulate their aims with a greater sureness, and these have rightly been adopted by the Left. There is, however, a troublesome paradox inherent in great sureness. Namely that, concomitant with the overwhelming conviction of correctness, there is an unadmitted fear of being contradicted. Thus, the most firmly held beliefs can also be those most tenuously held. Christians know this as the doubt that occasionally afflicts their faith.

Unfortunately, in politics, the insecurity of people who think they know that they are right too often manifests itself as an attempt to suppress contradiction. This is true right across the political spectrum. The old Soviet ideology of an historically determined invincibility, for example, had to resort to massive censorship and suppression to sustain itself. The present Reagan administration in America feels obliged to devote enormous resources against the tiny country of Nicaragua, whose people, freely allowed, would choose a government critical of the most powerful country in the world.

That Ronald Reagan's insecurity, verging almost on paranoia, grows out of his monomaniac world view is clear. He sees the Sandinista regime as an affront which must be obliterated. Is it too much to suggest that feminist censoriousness is analogous?

THE ANSWER TO this question must be no. Both Reagan and modern day feminists are attempting to deal by suppression with what they, rightly or wrongly, find abhorrent. Radical illiberalism is no different to reactionary illiberalism.

Without a doubt, in both these kinds of thought rationality goes by the board. Opposing positions, opposing groups of interest, are set up as being immutably irreconcilable. The only way for the supposedly correct position to achieve supremacy is through coercion. Take away the rhetoric of liberation and freedom and this disturbing tactic is all that remains.

Of course the alternative is almost as unpalatable. But the argument against suppression or censorship is precisely that offensive and disturbing things must be recognised, rather than conjured away. Of course it is outrageous to expect women to put up with the continual degradation of their sex. But surely the implications of resorting to intolerance are even worse.

A consensual, rational and moral victory will always, in the long run, be more effective than a conflictual, irrational and authoritarian one. In any case, the day still seems to be approaching when people are generally well enough educated to regard the misrepresentation of women with the disdainful boredom it deserves.

The great irony about the situation in Brighton is that the mainstream Left only recently gained control of a Labour party which in 1983 stood a Militant candidate for Parliament. This was done entirely without recourse to expulsions or even the banning of literature sales, and no doubt sustained the vitality of the party. □

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MEDIA

Peacock pursued his pipe-dream

PHILLIP WHITEHEAD

THERE CAN have been few odder state papers than the Report of the Peacock Committee. On the major questions in its remit, it failed to deliver what the Prime Minister and the carnivores in her party demanded. There was no evidence to sustain the case for the BBC taking advertising. And some of the commissioned research, notably that from the Leeds University group, pointed up powerfully the range and quality of British broadcasting that the existing system provides, for all its faults. But the dominant intellects on the Committee are convinced that they have made the case for a completely de-regulated future. They were untroubled that few praised them, and burial seemed imminent. They wrote, Sam Brittan said, like Beethoven, for posterity.

Now that they belong to the ages what are we to make of their plans for the span of our mortality, some of which could wreak havoc elsewhere in the system, some of which have merit? They wish to abandon what Annan called the principle of regulated diversity. They think they will keep the diversity without the regulation. They would begin by auctioning off ITV and DBS franchises. This is a sop for the carnivores which Douglas Hurd, himself a natural herbivore, may be pressed to take. We have seen already attempts by Rank to seize Granada. Carlton Communications have circled hungrily around Thames. If the asset-stripping raid on Pearsons were to be successful Yorkshire Television would be tossed into the maw of some predator unless the IBA once more intervened. That is what is happening now, unsanctioned.

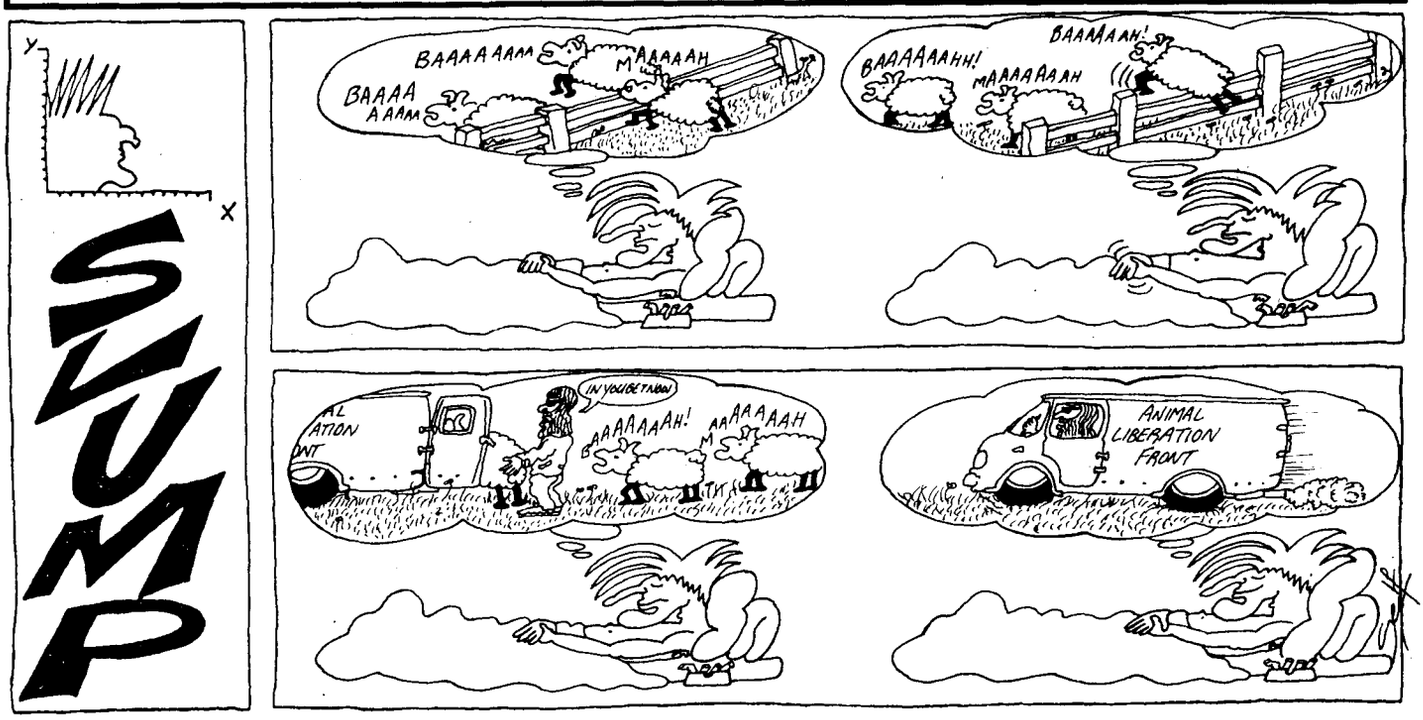
Is there any reason to think we should have better television as a result? Peacock argues that it would be better because leaner, and indeed the restrictive practices of ITV are overdue for change. But the idea that the highest bidder for a franchise would be the most efficient, let alone the best, provider of programmes is based on a mis-reading of who would put up the money, and why. ITV companies are worth money to multi-national operators for reasons quite other than the quality of the programmes they propose to produce. Peacock accepts that the highest bidder would not always be chosen, but the IBA would be put in the confessional if it did otherwise. This proposal is not the way to bring down ITV costs.

The other interim suggestion for both ITV and BBC — that within ten years they should take up to 40 per cent of their programmes from the British independent sector — has more merit. The BBC at least is making one its grand strategic gestures in this direction. 'We know we have to go out and chase the talent', Bill Cotton said at the BAFTA presentation for independents which the BBC staged this week. Maybe they will, but on their terms. Greater plurality in British broadcasting will come if different editorial voices and production values can flourish within a more loosely regulated system, in which the entrenched self interest of the duopoly is not always dominent.

Loosely regulated; not unregulated — that is where Peacock's tale of the Twenty-First Century seems to me to go wrong. Market choice is not always the widest choice, even with the technical tool of the scrambled signal to bring about pay-as-you-view subscription services. The paper commissioned by Peacock from Professor Jay Blumley describes the 'cultural infanticide' practised by American television in its much more loosely regulated environment. Peacock wants a national common carrier for cable, saying tersely that he is 'aware that the development of cable systems has been slower than expected'. So much for Kenneth Baker's dream of an entertainment-led private enterprise national cabling. Now it is recommended that all restrictions on overseas ownership of these stations be abolished.

It is possible that a national common carrier, in partnership between public and private sectors, will be established this century, and will allow those parts of the country which have it to use encrypted or scrambled signals for each channel carried. But the new technology discriminates. Such a system will bring a multiplicity of benefits to its subscribers, but they are unlikely to be the population at large. For them Peacock proposes a general switch to subscription services, as an act of political will, in the middle term. After that the regulatory bodies can wither away. The consumer will be king.

Peacock travels a long way round to reach an ideological goal. The possibilities of greater diversity within a regulated system, where lavish earnings in one area can be re-distributed to fund creativity and wider choice in others, are not for him, unless it is the only way to preserve choice, as with the Public Service Broadcasting Council. Nothing is done about the existing structures of the old duopoly, nor about the new forces in radio. Community radio, betrayed yet again this year by the Home Office, gets two paragraphs of description, not a word of commendation. Plurality is here, all around us. We do not need to dig up Adam Smith in order to help it along. □



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DIARY

Anne Smith

Edinburgh

Further side effects of Women's Lib? A masseur complained to me about the number of his female clients who either grope him or try to get him to grope them as they lie on his couch. It's only started in the last ten years, he said, but it gets worse all the time. He also says that a high percentage of his female clientele have unfaithful husbands. At the same time, my masseuse friend is fed up to the teeth with the sexual approaches, not to mention the blatantly messy orgasms of some of her male clients. Maybe what we really need is singles bars?

○

I wonder if the BMA lumped massage parlours in with alternative therapies in their recent report. As one who has benefitted from chiropractic and acupuncture, I was pretty disgusted by its dismissive tone. Shortly after it was published, I spoke to an acupuncturist. The subject of infertility came up. He showed me a sheaf of letters from women, thanking him or cancelling their next appointment, because they had become pregnant after he had treated them. What would be really interesting, and is surely long overdue, is an Alternative Therapists' report on orthodox medicine. The stories I have heard from chiropractors alone would make six sensational volumes: people always try the straight men first, after all.

○

But anyway, I was reliably informed last week, the consultants run the NHS. They run it in their own interests, too, according to my source. The last or latest perk they have received is cut-rate cars. The consultant pays around £80 a month. In return he gets a shiny new car, taxed and insured and maintained on the NHS. At the end of two years he can buy it at the second-hand rate — it will still be maintained etc. as before — or traded in for a new one on the old terms. If you add the cost of this perk to the cost of administering it . . . well, you could open a ward or two, probably.

○

Still among the caring professions, I was shocked by the treatment two friends of mine, at different ends of the country, had received recently in old folks' homes. I described it in the *Scotsman* and invited readers to write to me in confidence about their own experiences. Not the big horror stories, but the subtleties of intimidation — the thousand and one little things you can do to make an old person's life quietly wretched if you really try. A sheaf of heart-rending letters came in. One man summed the situation up: 'While specific instances of what might be called abuse are fairly rare, the general atmosphere is one of domineering, almost bullying attitudes on the part of some of the staff . . . it is difficult to know what one can do about it, as one cannot spread specific charges recklessly, while unless one is specific one can hardly expect to get anywhere.'

Last week I spoke to a fine, intelligent old woman whose life is being made miserable by the cleaner of the home she's in. Another one, with ulcerated legs, after she had asked for milk for her tea at an inopportune time, found that her legs were no longer being dressed every day — it went down to once a week. And when she said 'I did call for the maid' she was ticked off: 'They are not called maids. They are not servants. They are carers.' There ought to be an equivalent of the AA guide to old folks' homes. Failing that, it ought to be compulsory for the managers to place a copy of *Home Life: A code of practice for residential care*, together with a list of specific names, addresses and phone numbers of disinterested people, who are prepared to deal sympathetically and dynamically with complaints, in every room of these establishments with a guarantee of anonymity to the complainant. I'm still looking into it, and would welcome information from readers, the more specific the better.

ROGER WODDIS

Fool's Errand

The Guardian *has likened Sir Geoffrey Howe to 'an ancient Mariner with an albatross of incomprehension around his neck'.*

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he telleth Mrs T:
'I do not have a hope in hell,
Now wherefore sendst thou me?'

She casts on him a cobalt eye:
'Thou art the only man
Equipp'd to con the Commonwealth,
And train'd to take the can.'

He biteth on his lower lip:
'And what if I should fail?'
'Then wilt thou want to jack it in,'
At which he turneth pale.

'Then am I curs'd, for I am doom'd
To wear this albatross.'
'Quite honestly, 'twixt thee and me,
I giveth not a toss.'

Botha, Botha, everywhere,
'Tis later than they think;
Botha, Botha, everywhere
And Nelson still in clink.

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
The meek and pliant Mariner
Would rather be in bed,
Because he knows a bloody mess
Is all that lies ahead.

He went like one that hath been stunn'd,
And is of hope forlorn,
The sheepish and obedient butt
Of universal scorn.

○

Does it strike anyone else as odd that the police marksman who shot John Shorthouse should have said in his press statement '. . . I am content that an English jury has heard all the evidence and agreed with this.' Why mention *English* specifically? The statement itself is so full of hidden persuaders that one is tempted to see the hand of Saatchi and Saatchi in it. Mind you, I'm acquiring a healthy respect for English law myself, as a Scot. I need to sue a lawyer in Edinburgh. A large part of the complex case in which he was involved has to be resolved in England. As a result I have had to consult English lawyers. If the lawyer I have to sue were practising in England, I am advised on all sides south of the border that I'd stand to win thousands of pounds. Because the lawyer is Scots, I'll be lucky if I recoup my original losses — financial losses that is: no compensation for the sleepness nights and the running around, the ill effects of this man's incompetence . . . the Scots still don't believe in the emotions.

In fact, it's getting to be a severe handicap altogether this Scottishness. When I told a fearfully pukka friend that I was thinking of applying for a Fellowship in an Oxford college, she said instantly, 'Oh no — they'll never take you in a thousand years M'dear! You can't teach English at Oxford with *that* accent!' *Tant pis* for Oxford, eh?

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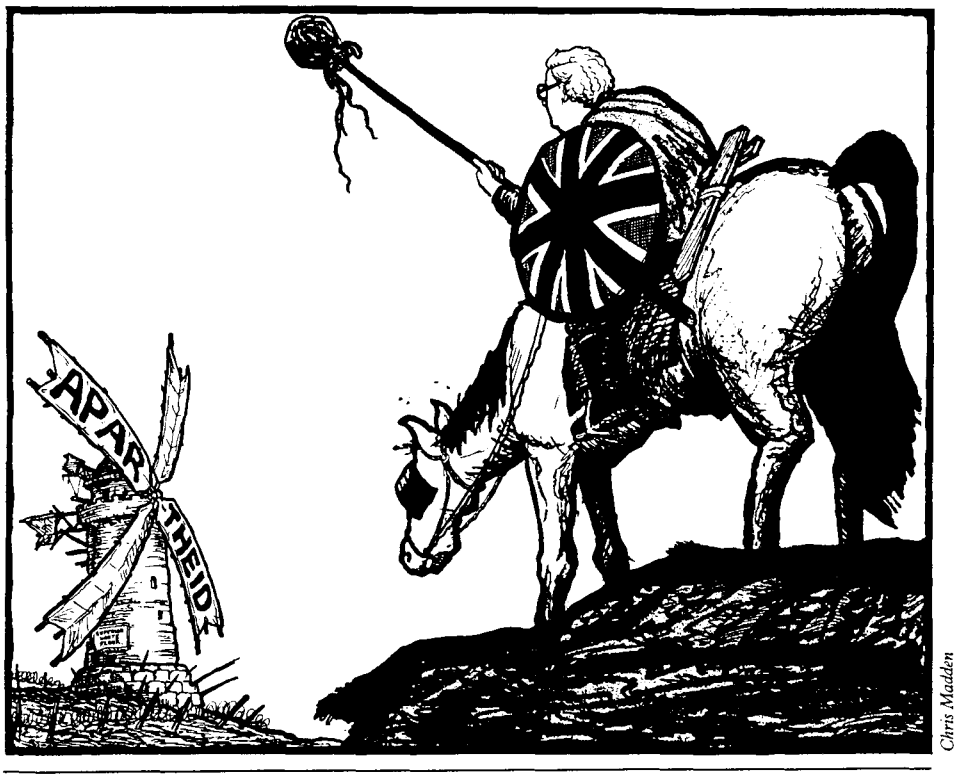
BOTHA BACKS INTO THE CORNER WITH NEO-NAZIS



Chris Madden

Whites are sleeping safer under the Emergency, not because the repression has crushed Black protest but because their media insulates them from reality. PHILLIP VAN NIEKERK examines the few cards the government has left to play before the violence permanently breaks the white sleep

Johannesburg

TWO TRENDS can be discerned in South Africa's four-week-old State of Emergency: whites are solidifying behind the Nationalist Party government again and mass protest, now totally banned, is being replaced by random bombs on street corners.

If calm at last seems to be returning to the potholed streets of the black ghettoes it is, in the words of Bishop Desmond Tutu, a 'sullen calm', achieved by brutal repression, tough even by South African standards. The security forces have occupied the ghettoes, more than 5,000 people are believed to have been detained and virtually all open dissent has been smashed.

South Africa has paid a high price for what is at best an illusory calm. Black South Africa is still angry, its demands for justice and universal suffrage are still unmet and the chances for negotiations for any real peace in South Africa have been wrecked.

'They want to smash us,' says Dr Allan Boesak, a patron of the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front, 'and they have fallen back on what for them is a sure-fire method,' yet, says Boesak, 'the thing is, it is not working'. He points out that the last, partial state of emergency failed to curtail Black protest. 'In a year of the worst repression, with all the major leadership in jail and no political meetings, we actually increased our membership.'

But the government clearly did not take the last abortive State of Emergency as their example when they decided on action this time around. It looked back to the first State of Emergency in 1960. In that year the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress were outlawed, Black opposition was silenced for more than a decade and the South African economy entered a boom which was to give it one of the fastest growth rates in the world.

For many whites, the Emergency this time has again meant that they can sleep peacefully in their beds at night. They trust the security forces to protect them and are not particularly perturbed by the press blackout because, they believe, what they don't know won't hurt them. Never before, even in South Africa, have whites and Blacks inhabited such absolutely different worlds.

Professor Willem Kleynhans, the head of political science at the University of South Africa, says there is now virtually no difference between supporters of the government and the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging on the security issue. In fact, the government is stealing the far Right's political clothes, rallying whites together in indignant anger at the 'meddling' outside world. 'We will show the world we will not be soft', thundered South Africa's foreign minister, Pik Botha, supposedly one of the cabinet 'liberals', at a meeting in Witbank last week.

But if the government perfectly understands the white electorate, showing why it has won election after election since 1948, it is badly out of touch with two other constituencies — Black South Africa and the rest of the world. International hostility and Black anger have reached an extraordinary pitch. The world, too, has changed since 1960.

ALL EVIDENCE points to the South African government having painted itself into a corner: the only way to maintain the present calm is to maintain the State of Emergency, keep the Black leaders in jail and keep up the level of repression. It has been clear for some time that the Emergency — originally supposed to quash protests planned around 16 June, as the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising of 1976 — is unlikely to be lifted soon. This was confirmed recently by the Minister of Law and Order, Louis Le Grange.

But in the long term, such permanent levels of repression would spell not only the end for the government's 'reform' programme but any hope for even relatively peaceful political change in South Africa.

During a frank moment in the South African Parliament recently, Le Grange echoed what many of his critics have been telling him: that the people the government should be talking to were in jail. 'There are presently people in detention who may be urgently needed for dialogue', said Le Grange. 'However, because of their activities it is not possible to talk until law and order is maintained.'

The Nationalist Party is to hold a crucial federal congress on 12 and 13 August where it is expected to examine new reforms, the most important of which will be a proposed National Council, giving Blacks representation at the highest level in central government. President Botha is understood to view this as the main negotiating mechanism for drawing up a new constitution, granting Blacks some form of vote in the central government.

The huge question is which Blacks will agree to serve on the Council other than Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, whose Inkatha movement has been left conspicuously untouched by the Emergency. But even Buthelezi — a shrewd political

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survivor — is a doubtful candidate and, without him, the government would be forced to trot out the same tired collection of Black councillors and homeland leaders, who have been so discredited in their own communities that most have to live outside the ghettoes and surround themselves with security fences and permanent bodyguards.

Botha, as the first Nationalist leader prepared to consider Black representation in the central government of the country, genuinely believes that he has bent over backwards to reform apartheid, but has been treated unfairly by 'radicals' and the international community. He need not look far to find out why. As the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group concluded: 'While the government claims to be ready to negotiate, it is in truth not yet prepared to negotiate fundamental change, nor to countenance the creation of genuine democratic structures, nor to face the prospect of the end of white domination and white power in the foreseeable future.'

Before the Emergency, the government faced two choices. Instead of choosing to come to terms with the aspirations of the majority of people in South Africa and sit down to determine a new political order, the government has clamped down and thus laid itself open to a new challenge.

The known leaders have gone, detained or driven into hiding or exile. In their places, the resistance in the townships is being led by faceless people. With legitimate protest effectively outlawed, bombs have started going off on street corners, in restaurants and in take-away outlets.

Some say it is only a matter of time before right-wing whites, who have armed themselves to the teeth, respond in like fashion. And then the Emergency will be looked back on as the calm before the storm, to be followed by what the Eminent Persons Group predicted could be the worst bloodbath since the Second World War. □

END OF COLONIALISM

NIGERIA'S CONSERVATISM SET TO CHANGE

For the first time since independence, a new generation wants to free politics from ethnic divides reports SUZANNE CRONJE

A SERIES OF MEASURES anounced by President Babangida last month confirm that he is now set to change the political face of Nigeria: the old politicians are out in the cold for the foreseeable future — and so is religion as an instrument of state power.

The timing coincides with the decline of Sokoto as a major spiritual and political force in Nigeria. Last month a committee was appointed to act on behalf of Sir Abubakar III, the Sultan of Sokoto, who is approaching 90 and has been on the throne for half a century. Through his court the Moslem North has maintained effective control over the entire Nigerian federation — an arrangement which goes back to colonial days and which has been the most divisive force in Nigerian politics.

Babangida's statement dealt at length with the long-expected adjustments to the foreign exchange system. The collapse of world oil prices has made economic reconstruction a priority, and Babangida spoke with considerable bitterness about the hostile reception by Nigeria's traditional trading partners to his proposals for debt rescheduling on mutually acceptable terms.

Britain has orchestrated the refusal by creditor nations to settle with Nigeria except under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund, whose proposals Lagos had already rejected.

This supports political suggestions that Nigeria may be tougher than expected at the seven-nation Comonwealth summit next month when Britain's cavalier treatment of the recent Commonwealth report on South Africa will be discussed. The rather muted response from Lagos to Mrs Thatcher's outrageous support of the apartheid regime is likely to change at that point.

Nigeria, which comprises a quarter of Africa's total population, and possesses considerable mineral wealth as well as oil, has until now made little effort to have an international impact. On the few occasions when it tried, however, the results were impressive. During the negotiations for Zimbabwe's independence, for instance, when Lagos nationalised BP to express its distaste for London's southern Africa policy, the British business community, afraid it might lose its valuable Nigerian market, started to lobby the newly elected Tory government on behalf of Rhodesia's Black nationalists.

Whitehall, though, was confident that this Nigerian move was an exception. It happened under a leader (General Obasanjo, a member of the recent Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa) who was about to hand over to a civilian successor. This successor — President Shagari — was the sort of man the British used to pick in colonial days — a politician from Sokoto. When Shagari himself was overthrown in a military coup five years later, the man who ousted him, General Buhari, was yet another Sokoto leader.

This is more than a coincidence. After all, Sokoto is now only one of 19 states, but for more than 100 years its conservative Moslem aristocracy has ruled the whole of Northern Nigeria. The Sultan of Sokoto, the most eminent of Nigeria's emirs, called himself Sarkin Musulmi — king of the Moslems — and the British not only accepted his status and that of the other chiefs, but helped to shore up their authority and kept out the modern influences that were already transforming the south. The result was a backward Northern Region, which the British endowed through their independence constitution with sufficient clout to dominate the federal government of Nigeria.

WHEN BABANGIDA seized power in August last year, Sir Abubaker sent the new leader a message reminding him that he ruled by the grace of Allah — and by implication that of Sokoto. Babangida's reply, that he wished to 'de-emphasise religion and ethnicity', was not well received in the North. Nor was the determined campaign by Sokoto's new military governor to promote Western education in the state.

The North's educational backwardness has made it difficult for Northerners to get by merit what they considered to be their rightful share of government posts. This led to the introduction of a quota system, which went under the name of federalism, much resented by better qualified Nigerians from other parts of the country. The present government hopes to solve the problem in the only possible long term way: through investing in Northern education and secularising it.

When Babangida, who is himself a Moslem, stressed last month that Nigeria was a multi-religious state, he put an end to Moslem attempts to introduce Islam as the state religion. There were also campaigns to institute Moslem law in southern courts.

Traditional Islam's ideological message has been a powerful political force favouring the emirates. While Babangida did not refer by name to any group, he aimed his remarks at these traditional interests: Nigeria could not allow itself to become a prisoner of the past or to mortgage present and future growth. From now on a National Council for Religious Affairs, with representatives from all religions, would advise the government.

The Sultan's court may not respond to this challenge as it would have in the past: quarrels about the succession to Abubakar's throne have divided the Northern aristocracy for some months, which probably explains Babangida's timing in excluding chiefs from any role in local government.

Babangida's popularity was greatly enhanced by that part of his statement excluding past politicians from political life for at least 10 years. Some of them have been in office since independence in 1960, serving both civilian and military governments and perpetuating the old North-South divisions. Babangida and his colleagues believe that the younger generation, born since independence, is more anxious to overcome ethnic or religious differences; at least the new dispensation will open politics to new ideas.

The new orientation — parallel with the passing of Sokoto's power, may mean the end of an era in which old colonial attitudes still pervaded Anglo-Nigerian relations. The first opportunity for the Lagos government to demonstrate this arises when the Commonwealth meeting in London later this month discusses S Africa and sanctions. □

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TIGRAY MARXISTS SEEK ALLIES

Ethiopia's independence movements are united against feudalism. JON BENNETT reports on what else could hold them together

THE ELEVEN year old civil war in Ethiopia's northern province of Tigray is, above all else, a fight for hearts and minds. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has clearly gained an upper hand in approximately 80 per cent of the countryside.

The TPLF's political base is a mass organisation structure of farmers, youth and women's associations in even the most remote areas. The organisational ability of the Front was adequately demonstrated, during the 1984-85 famine, when some 200,000 Tigrayans left for Sudan on a village-by-village basis under the auspices of their local government, the 'baitos'. This was not a spontaneous, disorganised exodus, but a well-ordered acceptance of defeat in the face of overwhelming odds. A majority of these refugees have now returned home, again under the direction and material assistance of TPLF and the Relief Society of Tigray.

Rehabilitation for Tigray's farming community comes in the wake of new political directions within the TPLF itself. The Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), which declared itself in public last July, is set to become the most important 'steering committee' within the Front. In 1983 the TPLF's Congress — the overall policy-forming body — approved the formation of any political party, provided it adhered to the democratic constitution. To date the MLLT is the only group to take up the challenge.

The League acknowledges that a full Communist programme for Tigray is neither possible nor desirable at this stage; yet the party will surely become a dominant influence in setting the political agenda for the coming years. When the maximum programme of the TPLF — land reform, civil administration and national self-determination (even independence, if necessary) — is completed, a State party system is envisaged.

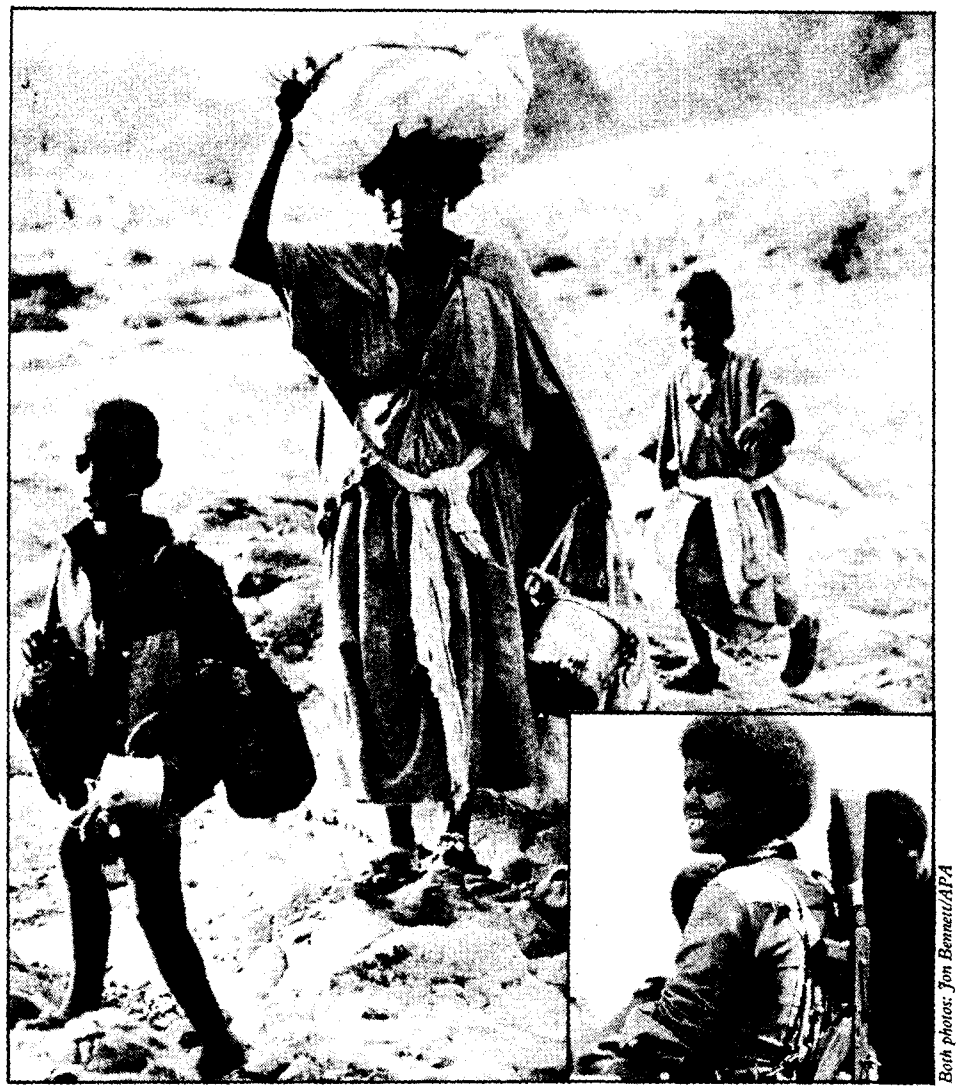
The democratic revolution instigated by the TPLF in 1975 is pledged to rid Tigray of feudal influence and foreign (ie Soviet-backed) domination. Once these tasks are achieved, says the League, a socialist programme centred on ownership of the means of production will be embarked upon.

Though ostensibly an independent initiative, many of the League's Central Committee of 21 are also in the current TPLF leadership. This is to be expected in a guerrilla movement, whose leaders include disaffected students from Ethiopia's revolutionary left of the early 1970s. Charges of elitism are, however, unfair. Radical social transformation in Tigray, including a nationwide civil administration unique to this area of the world, have realised the Front's claim to being a democratic movement.

For more than five years the TPLF has pursued military and political objectives beyond the borders of Tigray itself. It has periodically halted supply routes along the main road to the port of Assab as well as 'liberating' large areas of Gondar and Wollo provinces to the south. In promoting the idea of a United Front against the Soviet-backed Ethiopian government, the TPLF has also formed working alliances with the Ethiopian Democratic Movement and the Oromo Liberation Front.

Accordingly, the MLLT will be advocating a socialist programme for control of the economy and industry placed firmly within a pan-Ethiopian context. It has called on all 'genuine' Ethiopian socialists to join forces, perhaps rather ambitiously in the light of 10 years of factionalism and infighting amongst Ethiopia's disunited Left. The remarkably 'pure' line of the Tigrayan Marxists — drawn from Albanian and Maoist models — may well make it difficult for them to co-operate with other elements in the huge diversity in Ethiopian politics today. It also remains to be seen whether the MLLT will be able to attain a degree of accommodation within Tigray's largely peasant population.

Options for anti-government unity have been all the more restricted since the total breakdown of relations between the TPLF and Eritrea's main political front, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Still considered to be the most powerful independence movement in the horn of Africa, the EPLF's summary dismissal of Tigrayan military and political strategy, culminating in the closure of the access road to Sudan through Eritrea last year, has been a great shock to the TPLF and the quarrel shows no sign of abating. □



Both photos: Jon Bennett/APA

Tigrayans return from Sudan, under the direction of the TPLF, a third of whose fighters are women (inset)

'And ever more came out of that same door wherein I went' . . .

This was the plaint of a man who could not escape the common round of conventional answers to his questions. Perhaps he was stuck in beliefs — maybe even sacred ones — but he was stuck. Is there no way out?

Perhaps; if you would like to see, write to:

The Blavatsky Trust (B)
P.O. Box 16, London W3 6HS

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WE NEED DIVORCE PLEASE VOTE YES
OUR PROBLEM CAN ONLY BE SOLVED BY DIVORCE PLEASE VOTE YES
WOMEN OF IRELAND PLEASE VOTE YES FOR US

Derek Speirs/Report

A life in Limbo

NELL McCAFFERTY describes the price the Irish pay for the illusion that marriage must be permanent

ON THE NIGHT before the Irish voted massively against divorce, a representative from Debrett went on BBC television, which is available to most Irish viewers. The Englishman smoothly outlined the etiquette for seating divorced parents at the Royal wedding. The mother and her second husband would sit on one side of the aisle, the father and his second wife would sit on the other. The children of the first marriage would sit . . .

And the whole world would watch.

Jaysus.

This is how we do things across the channel: A man confirms that his marriage is finally over. His father's face sets in concrete and his mother clutches her breast. She knew, says the mother, the day her son set off for his wedding that it would not work. There was no telling him that, of course. He was over 21. Deep sorrow, dismay and sadness seep into his clan. There is a hint of terror. He is a Catholic. The future looms blank, black and silent, in face of that fact.

The man does the decent thing.

He leaves the village.

Everybody accepts the public story that he has gone in search of work. His wife retains status. The man comes back for the First Communion and confirmation of his children. He does not stay long and people know not to ask why. He knows not to talk about the distant town where he now lives. He is a man without a past or a future.

In his middle age the man falls seriously ill. His mother knows not to ring the house where he lives. She does not want to hear a female voice. She cannot go to the hospital where he is lying. She would be unable to confront the fact the woman visitor on the other side of the bed has a relationship with him.

★ ★ ★

The name for this relationship is stark, brutal, insulting and immutable in a country where 95 per cent of the population subscribes to the Roman Catholic faith. Adultery. Rather than use this term, because we are as human as everybody else and know that nobody went down the aisle of the Church in the bright days of youth meaning harm to anybody else, we solve the

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dilemma by neither confronting it nor thinking of it. It is consigned to the unspeakable, the unthinkable, to the theological limbo between heaven and hell, where God alone will judge.

Limbo used to be known as the place where little babies went if they died suddenly, before baptism, or pagans went whom we were unable to reach. Limbo lulls, Limbo soothes — if our human judgement on the babies and the pagans seemed harsh, we knew at the back of our tortured minds that God would look after them eventually, and bring them to heaven, because God is omnipotent and ultimately loving and can solve riddles.

As a theological concept, Limbo has been quietly dropped, but the lay memory of a religiously untutored race is strong, and we retain Limbo in our thoughts as an earthly place of hope for our separated brethren, those brothers and sisters whom we know and love and had to put outside the parish pale. Please, God, look after them for us.

★ ★ ★

So the mother picks up the phone and asks one of her daughters to go and visit her son and see that he is all right. There is no need to explain why it has to be done this way, and no desire to have it spelt out. We cannot argue with the revealed truth of truth mediated by the priests, and we cannot bear to look closely at the way we behave in consequence.

★ ★ ★

Too much sacrifice has made a stone of our hearts, said the poet Yeats. We were reared in school and at home on the sacrifices made to keep the faith alive through the dreadful times of the penal laws, when the English who ruled Ireland decreed that no Catholic could own a horse worth more than five pounds, and the priests risked death to say forbidden Mass in the ditch.

★ ★ ★

The daughter goes to the far away town and meets her seriously ill brother and the woman who is worried sick about him, keeping watch by his bedside, and the children who call him Daddy. The little innocent cheerful children are delighted to meet their new Aunt. God forgive her, and God will, she plays at happy family with them.

This was no time, around that sick bed, to raise the bitter memories of the poverty he left behind, the other children he seldom saw and had little chance to see anyway, because we sent him into exile. Later, his sister and his mother speak, sparingly, about him, and the truth of his other life forces itself in under the weight of the ultimate question: what if he had died? In which town would he have been buried, who would have gathered around the graveside, who would have spoken to whom, or handle the worst fate of all, that of making the introductions? So many children, looking like him, not knowing each other, or the terms for each other. 'This is his wife, this is his . . .' Other woman?

Jaysus, Mister Debrett.

The mother and daughter lightened the pall with black jokes. Cremate him. Scatter the ashes from Belfast to Bantry. Stick two empty wee boxes in two graves at opposite ends of the country. No one would be the wiser and there'd be enough brothers and sisters to make up a crowd at both funerals.

Cremation is a growing fashion whose time has come in Ireland. There is one crematorium on each side of the border.

The brother recovers and rings his mother. He wants his second family acknowledged. He has nearly died and he longs for his mammy. He's lonely in exile and he longs to come home occasionally, like the grown man he is, and share the details of his life and family, just like everybody else. Which family, asks his mother, fiercely loyal to the only one she knows.

She has her own problem to contend with. She is elderly now, and knows how close her own death is. It is time to review her life, the family she reared, and her relationship with her God. She had thought long and deeply about the consequences of the last constitutional referendum when the country voted massively against abortion. Babies unborn are God's creatures, God's souls. How could any parent harm a baby? Or any grandparent for that matter?

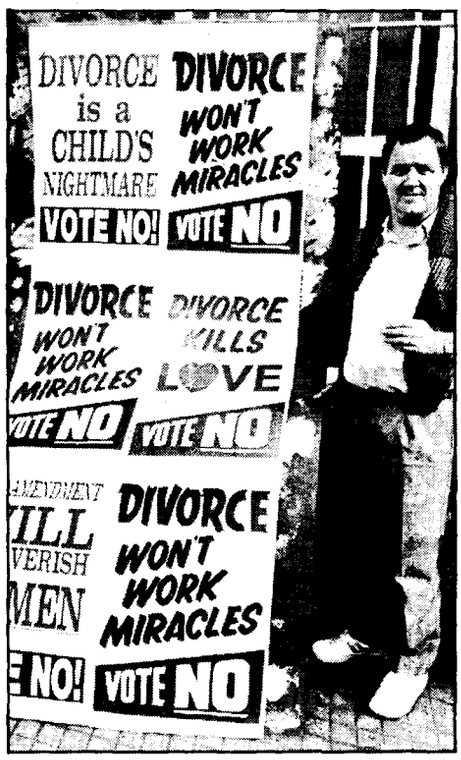
The man's mother thinks of her grandchildren in the distant town, on the small island. They were not aborted. They are flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. Illegitimate, born out of wedlock, against the laws of God and State, bastards one and all. Such names for her grandchildren, though they don't feel like her grandchildren. They don't have names, or faces, or ages, or even number. How many were there, anyway?

She doesn't know how to explain this to God, when they should meet, which will be quite soon, that she doesn't know how many grandchildren she has, nor how they are doing. It will sound like a hell of a story. 'Excuse me, God, but the rules were . . .' The question, she explained after coming to a decision, was this: what is my duty to my God?

The man brought one of the children to his home-village. The child was clean, literate, polite and delighted with her granny. The child did not look or feel or behave like the bastard of an adulterer.

Mind you, the priest was not invited to the meeting, and the neighbours, showing exquisite tact, did not come in, and the daughters were deployed around the area to keep the wife and children of the first family engaged. The first wife was marvellous about it. A mother could not deny her own son, she said. She hoped the matter would go no further than that. She too was entitled to her good name and standing. The first children were generous, adult, embarrassed and agonised. They did not want their mother hurt, nor to quarrel with their granny or father, and they did not want to know the new arrival. Of course they had known about it for a long time. Teenagers are not stupid.

There was one thing on which everybody was agreed, except the man: they did not want to know the second woman. We have no polite terms in which to address her, no social skills with which to handle her, no formal position in which to slot her, no Church Apologetics to equal those of Mr Debrett. We have no divorce, no remarriage and no room in which to breathe. Ireland is



Derek Speirs/Report

small, the towns smaller, the priests everywhere preaching the word of God and not a word from them about how to handle such a dilemma.

★ ★ ★

The opponents of divorce played the dilemma to the hilt. If everybody knew, and everybody did, someone whose marriage had broken down, we also knew the financial consequences of it: breakdown impoverishes the wife and 72 per cent of Irish wives function as unpaid mothers in the home. The men don't earn enough to support two families.

The government offered women welfare in exchange for divorce. 'It's like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas', said Alice Glenn, a member of that government and a fierce opponent of the proposal.

The Catholic Church offered God's law.

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'What God hath put together, let no man put asunder'. The government and pro-divorce campaigners started the campaign by agreeing with this statement. Garret FitzGerald proclaimed adherence to the Catholic faith and belief in life-long 'indissoluble monogamy', by which, we knew rightly, he meant marriage. He asked the people to distinguish between religious marriage, and civil re-marriage in a registry office.

Jaysus.

This was akin to offering Christmas without Santa Claus. Everybody in Ireland knew that registry office weddings weren't the real thing. The few who embark on even a first marriage in that Godless office publish the banns in Gaelic in the newspapers, in the hope that nobody will be able to translate evidence of their intended pagan deed. We get married in Churches. Even Protestants get married in Churches. The Protestants joined in the campaign with an announcement that they wouldn't remarry divorced people before the altar.

In an effort to rally the turkeys, the government launched an offensive against farmers. If they divorced their wives, they'd have to divide the land with her, or pay a lump sum in compensation. The majority of Irish farmers tend a small acreage. Split it up and there'd scarcely be room for the hens. The women of course would keep the hens. The government's proposal did not please the farmers. They'd spent years waiting on their fathers to die, brother sitting brother out for it, and centuries waiting for the British to leave, while half the population starved for want of mere potatoes, and now the government wanted to divide the land still further. As for buying the wife out — Jesus Christ, it hasn't stopped raining this past two years, the hay is floating by the door even as we speak and we're dependent on EEC subsidies to keep going.

Besides which, at the end of the day, God says no, and there's an end to the matter. An *Irish Times* commentator, Howard Kinlay, writing after the vote confirmed Catholic laws for a Catholic people, showed how he hadn't been able to see the wood for the trees. He had cast his vote in the state-built, state-financed national Catholic school, which is named after a saint. He then visited a friend in a state-built, state-financed, state-staffed Catholic hospital which is called after a vision of the mother of Jesus. His friend lay in a ward called after yet another saint. He then tuned into the state-built, state-financed and state-staffed radio station to hear how the poll was going and heard the twice-daily Bells of the Angelus ring out, as a prelude to the news. Next day the results and analysis were interrupted on state-built, state-financed and state-staffed television to accommodate the playing of the Angelus and a 60-second long contemplation of a painting of the Holy Family. Catholics are more Catholic than the Bishops themselves, who live in palaces.

Derek Speirs/Report

Casting your free vote in the state-built, state-financed school. Decorations by the Church

Doctor FitzGerald explained after the deluge why he had not played the Orange card during the debate. It would have led to an even greater defeat and confirmed the partition mentality. There was a certain tragic truth in the observation.

It would have been like asking the second woman to Christmas dinner. Imagine breaking up our own traditional way of life in order to clasp to our bosom those who have brought the North to the brink of civil war. Everybody knows that the Unionists are bad people. Even the British don't want them. Unionists are, of course, Protestants, but their religion is their own private business and they mustn't be judged by their God. There is unanimous agreement about this analysis. Lefties, liberals, politicians, priests and even Protestants have reiterated it down through the years and any contrary analysis — that the conflict in the North is rooted in religious division — would be hurtful to co-religionists of both faiths, and anathema to those of none. The Northern situation has nothing whatsoever to do with religion, so their religious beliefs were left out of the referendum. Besides which, the North doesn't approve of divorce. It was imposed on them, after Stormont has been abolished, by order-in-council from the mainland. The Reverend Ian Paisley agreed only last week, after the referendum failed, that there were scriptural prohibitions against divorce.

Well, he would, wouldn't he?

We have jokes about the implication of the anti-divorce vote for the future of the Anglo-Irish agreement that seeks to bring North and South together. First we bomb one million Protestants into the Republic. Then we bomb one million Catholics out of it.

Laugh? Back at home, the granny nearly cried. She has reconciled herself with her God, her son, and the children of the second union and she has kept faith with the only wife and she has not hurt or insulted the second woman to her face. If she's lucky, she'll die before that woman arrives on her door-step. Let the next generation handle that.

If only everybody could stay discreetly apart, observing the borders, established by propriety, religion and pain, with blood relatives meeting in private, hanging onto the notion of Limbo, and the assurance that God will surely look after us in death. To do other is to turn God's word in his mouth.

Some lefties think it would be better altogether to abolish God, especially the Catholic one. As well ask the English to abolish the Queen's title and role as Defender of the Protestant faith. Her son, too, had to settle for a private meeting, with no Mass, with the Pope.

★ ★ ★

Garret FitzGerald announced that he hopes to see divorce introduced before he dies. The man, now made redundant, rang his mother to say that he was emigrating to Australia. It is so very far away. His sisters will be unable to go see him if he should fall ill, or be lonely. His mother would like him to know, before she dies, that someone on the other side of the world will take care of him and love him. God forgive her, and God surely will, but she would like the consolation of knowing that he is in good hands. She will meet him, and his woman, on the shore, before the boat leaves.

★ ★ ★

Thirty-six point three per cent of the Irish people voted for the introduction of divorce. We are a young nation and a family and the growing pains are fierce.

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Sharon Kivland busy installing 'All that Glitters is not Gold' at the Air Gallery

ART

Fiddling while Rome burns

Mo Dodson

Street games used to be hopscotch, marbles and fivestones: now, around the AIR GALLERY, London, the game being played is New Sculpture.

SCULPTORS NO LONGER sculpt: they *install*. At the Air Gallery's 'New Sculpture Show', the installations begin inside the gallery and then discreetly reveal themselves in the streets around and about. Much of the work is two-dimensional, in spite of the exhibition's name.

So, what's in a name? Why should sculptors carve or mould if, instead, they want to nail spoons to the wall of a urine-infested stairwell in Rosebery Avenue, or pile up a mound of junked washing machines on weed-ridden wasteland and draw on them the outlines of ruined classical columns: the glory, as it were, that was Bendix.

But the name *is* important. For some years avant-garde artists have been exhibiting one kind of artefact and calling it something else. Sometimes, especially in the early days, this conflict of categories and expectations produced a conceptual spark that could, with a little help, blaze up into an intellectual flame; now, however, the surprise has faded and what started as a daring gesture has withered to an academic mannerism.

Of course, installations have to deal with the three-dimensional space they occupy and, in that sense, they are quasi-logical extensions of the concerns of traditional sculpture, one of whose functions was to 'inject meaning' into a public space. And it is with the meaning of public spaces that the Air Gallery installation sculptors are concerned. Their method is to introduce objects into the Clerkenwell area that, by being unintelligible in terms of the standard visual grammar of the street, gradually intrude themselves on the consciousness of passers-by.

As I strolled up Clerkenwell Road towards the Air Gallery, little disturbances began to occur in my own sense of the physical environment. What seemed to be a series of rather large company logos done in a 'naive-representational' style were stuck to the front of a garage-like building. They were by no means garish in colour and it was only because there were no attached written company identifications that I realised these 'logos' might not be logos at all.

The gallery exhibition itself was something of a disappointment after this and, as soon as I could, I followed the mapped route to the other exterior installations. The most positive thing I can say is that I discovered some unexpectedly fascinating streets in Clerkenwell.

The concern of the eight young sculptors on show, to quote the Air Gallery's press release, 'is to relate their work to the local environment and community'. The woolly-minded good intentions of this statement aptly reflect the work produced. As no local community in the strict sense of the phrase exists in any 20th-century conurbation, any attempt by artists to relate to such an entity seems to be eminently futile. Even if we take 'local community' to mean 'people who live in or use the area', it is difficult to see how the site installations — deliberately 'meaningless' if always decorous environmental intrusions — could relate to such an heterogenous group of people. For gallery aficionados, on the other hand, this type of work is easily assimilated into general expectations of the Post-Modernist rejection of pure form in favour of topical visual quotation and figuration all 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast' of Conceptual Art.

By trying to make out that the urban environment's 'meaning' can be changed by means of aesthetic intrusions, the Air Gallery's sculptors evade confrontation with the fundamental nature of the social forces and institutions that have created this environment. The ugliness, the alienation, the absence of any communally validated 'sense of place' will continue to be the 'meaning' of our urban environment until the social order that created this ugliness is itself subjected to fundamental change. Post-Modernist jokes merely divert our attention.

The ideal audience for this exhibition is, therefore, a group of pre-school-age children for whom every advertisement is a mysterious narrative needing interpretation, every logo an Egyptian hieroglyph, every visual novelty profoundly meaningful: 'Daddy, why does your bank have an eagle over the doorway?' 'Who put those yellow lines on the road?' Children can enjoy a brief period of innocent delight with this illusion of public 'symbolic richness' because they are too young to understand the reality that lies behind the symbols: a barren and hostile cultural wasteland created by the very people for whom the symbols were made.

And perhaps a little self-delusion is sometimes needed by adults, too, for the preservation of sanity, but can we afford to allow ourselves the same indulgence as children? □

The exhibition inside the Air Gallery is in two parts: 2 July-22 July and 6 August-26 August.

THEATRE

Lovable types

Benedict Nightingale

I'm Not Rappaport
HERB GARDNER *Apollo*
Neaptide
SARAH DANIELS *Cottesloe*

THE PROBLEM with **I'm Not Rappaport** is the problem with a good deal of American drama these days. Its author has some not-insignificant points to make and the skill to embody them in situation and dialogue. But

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there's a level at which he just doesn't trust the seriousness of his audience. So he tries too often, too hard, to beguile and charm it.

Dialogue increasingly comes to consist of wry quips, waggish retorts. The characters insidiously become that awful thing, lovable and, at times, they even become cute. It's an affliction one might call Neilsimonities, after its best-known current sufferer, and it's not one to take lightly. It can be terminal, deadly to truth and art alike.

Rappaport, it's true, resists the worst ravages of this killer-virus. For instance, it does not finally pretend, as at first seems likely, that a murderous drug baron can be outwitted by an aged prankster who puts dark glasses over his eyes, a carnation in his buttonhole, white gloves on his hands and announces himself as the celebrated mafioso Tony the Cane. The accomplishments with which Herb Gardner credits the old pretender he calls Nat are slighter and smaller than that. Nevertheless, he clearly finds his impishness captivating, his games-playing enchanting and, by the end, has custom-built a front-running candidate for apotheosis as one of the *Reader's Digest*'s Most Memorable Characters I Ever Met.

When we meet him, he's on his bench in Central Park, regaling his Black neighbour with a tall tale of being an escaped Cuban terrorist 'in deep cover'. Then on jogs a dapper young executive, committee chairman of the apartment block where the Black man, old and half-blind though he is, still works as caretaker. Suddenly Nat has transformed himself into a poverty lawyer nicknamed the Cobra and is thwarting his friend's sacking with a fusillade of artfully contrived pleas, gibes and threats. Nor is the evening's masquerade finished yet. In stalks a pleasant, middle-aged woman who turns out to be Nat's daughter, worried enough by her father's irresponsibility and vulnerability to blackmail him into surrendering to the sort of day centre where earnest lectures on intergenerational relationships break up the endless bridge sessions. His reaction is to invent a second, illegitimate daughter, who (he declares) has appeared unannounced from Israel and is about to take him to live there. And, somewhat implausibly, the woman believes him.

The real trouble with the evening, though, isn't the gullibility of some of Nat's dupes. It's that his author sees him as a blend of oracle and champion of the oppressed —or, at any rate, asks him to carry more moral weight than he can manage. He's an ex-officio grey panther, sombrely warning the young that he and his peers are what they'll become. He's also a bit of a radical, sufficiently committed to have been a union activist in his youth and now to mount exemplary sorties against butchers' shops in protest against the price of meat. Indeed, his daughter ruefully remembers that she was the only student at the great Columbia sit-in 'whose father turned up to coach'.

But his author doesn't see the character's revolutionary instincts as much more than eccentricities, his socialism as one of those wayward traits that make the old fellow such a marvellous old card. The effect is not, to be sure, as sentimental as might have been. For one thing, Gardner is a less relentlessly folksy dramatist than some one could name and, for another, Paul Scofield, who plays Nat, is an actor capable of half-convincing you that the light and shallow is dark and deep. Consequently, the old trickster's attempt to convert a passing mugger to working-class solidarity is a bit more than a joke and his grim diatribe against youthful insensitivity verges on the impressive. And yet, as one leaves him defeated but indefatigable, still spinning his tales, an old rogue who'll be doing a vaudeville routine inside his coffin, one can't help feeling the character has been patronised as winsome, his predicament trivialised as droll.

The problem with **Neaptide** is the problem with a fair number of British plays these days. One is only too aware that the characters, realistic though they are supposed to be, are pieces of evidence by which the author, simultaneously judge and counsel for the prosecution and defence, has determined to win our mental and emotional vote. In this case, the argument is rather similar to the one advanced by Harvey Fierstein in his recent *Torch Song Trilogy*. There, it was suggested that a gay man could be as effective a mother-cum-father as any natural parent. Here, the proposition is that lesbians should have the same rights as straights, most especially where their own children are concerned.

And why not? But both plays leave the impression of having unnecessarily loaded the forensic dice. Fierstein implausibly postulated a hopeless delinquent magically transformed into Mr Clean after six months fostering by his hero. Daniels surrounds her teacher-heroine, impeccable mother of a perfectly adjusted daughter, with a series of unabashed stereotypes: a rancorous, vindictive husband who sees his child as a piece of property to be forcibly reclaimed; a fellow-teacher whose only function is to incarnate the chauvinist swine, down to offering the distraught mother support if she'll have sex with him; a headmistress whose response to the sniff of lesbianism in the classroom is ludicrously exaggerated hysteria. There are, it's true, a few gestures in the direction of 'balance', but they're too obvious and too flimsy to carry weight. Consequently, one just can't believe a denouement in which sisterhood asserts itself in the most implausible places, including the headmistress (lesbian herself really) and the heroine's narrow, bigoted mum (a good sort underneath). There must be, there *are* better feminist plays than this. □

Recommended viewing

A regular selection by our critic from films still doing the rounds

After Hours (15) Martin Scorsese's dazzling black comedy of New York night life, a nightmare of eroded identity that touches a real nerve.

Compromising Positions (15) Likeable comedy-thriller, with suburban housewife Susan Sarandon investigating the murder of her dentist. Enjoyable dialogue and some sly feminist points.

Runaway Train (18) Andrei Konchalovsky's ugly, implausible and pretentious thriller nevertheless delivers everything an audience could want from an action picture.

CINEMA

Mauve

Adam Mars-Jones

The Color Purple (15)
ABC Shaftesbury Avenue

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *The Color Purple* is based 'upon' Alice Walker's novel, and the reverence of the preposition is eloquent; but every film of a book is an involuntary act of literary criticism. Faults of structure tend to stand out rather starkly when the words are stripped away.

Spielberg's difficulties with tone, particularly in the early scenes, are revealing. He films the heroine's childbed in the dead of winter with so much realism that the newborn baby steams, then in the same scene shows her father — also the father of her child — snatching the baby from her arms with a brutality that would make even the villains from silent films, for all their hand-rubbing and moustache-twirling, hiss him off the screen.

There is more villainy in store for poor Celie (Whoopi Goldberg). When a man comes to court her sister Nettie, her father gives Celie away instead, unasked and unasking. Nettie stays at home until Pa's sexual harassment becomes intolerable, then pays a visit to Celie in her new home. Celie's husband in turn makes Nettie's life a misery with his propositions. When Nettie leaves, he vows to intercept any letters she writes to Celie, and does so for the next several decades.

The Color Purple, whether as a film or as a book — where the vigour of its dialect does something to disguise things — depends heavily on the plot-machinery of melodrama, with none of the serenely lubricated momentum of Victorian plot-machinery. Nettie, for instance, ends up as a missionary in Africa, and companion to the couple who have — unknowingly — adopted Celie's children. She lives, then, with her nephew and niece, unable to reveal the true basis of their relationship, just like Lady Isobel in *East Lynne* returning disfigured after a railway accident to be governess to her own children.

Having committed herself wholeheartedly to contrivance, the author of *East Lynne* would not then simply let things slide. In *The Color Purple* Nettie's return to America with Celie's children could have happened at any time, and is just another thing that happens to Celie — a joyous thing, admittedly, rather than an atrocious one, but a mere unmotivated event all the same.

Nor would Mrs Henry Wood, had she been able to write such a thing, have started a book with an incestuous rape and then let it fizzle out. Celie's Pa turns out not to be her father at all; and that is not a plot twist but a plot unravelment.

One of Spielberg's methods, faced with such uneven material, is simultaneously to

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Sisterhood or sensuality? Whoopi Goldberg and Margaret Avery leave it to us to decide

exaggerate and underplay, setting up a sequence broad to the point almost of slapstick and caricature and then choosing a subtle, or at least indirect, angle for his camera. So a crucial punch is obscured by a passing car, and Celie's husband ignorantly pouring kerosene on the stove is represented by a cut to Celie's suddenly deserted rocking-chair, the flames blooming only in reflection on the wall.

When Spielberg comes to dramatise Nettie's letters, which Celie finds in a strongbox of her husband's, he pulls out all the stops on his technique, setting up a string of visual and acoustic correspondences between Celie's surroundings and Nettie's, cutting from one continent to the other. The effect is emotionally impoverishing. If reading a letter is as good as being there, where's the sting of separation?

In the book, there are two means of overcoming separation: sexuality (between women) and a sort of pantheism. Spielberg attenuates both, and it's hard to blame him. A *Color Purple* without lesbianism would be like a whale-free *Moby Dick;* but Spielberg shows the relationship between Celie and the blues singer Shug Avery — whom Celie's husband also loves — only in one scene of chaste but lingering kisses. He has already taken risks with his audience by making a film in which Blacks are defined by their relationships with other Blacks, women by their relationships with other women. Now he leaves the viewer to calibrate those kisses on a scale from sisterhood to sensuality.

His problem is different with the book's rather icky pantheism — *The Color Purple* is dedicated to the Spirit, and the author thanks her characters for coming. A book can get away with the suggestion, two-thirds of the way through, that 'God is everything', but the movie camera is just naturally pantheistic. It can't keep the world out that long. Every panning shot wants to turn into an act of worship, and what we call *cutting* could just as easily be *joining.*

Spielberg substitutes as the climax of his film a celebration of culture for the book's celebration of nature. Shug Avery, estranged from her preacher father, leads a party from the juke joint where she has been singing and gatecrashes his gospel service. Her blues voice sings out against the gospel choir, and the warring elements, sacred and secular, African and American, come together in harmony. It's a brave rhetorical solution to the narrative weakness of a book whose attraction was always its flesh and not its bone structure. □

TELEVISION

Forever England

Peter Hillmore

THE SALOON BAR first came into my living room a fortnight ago; I felt quite guilty about watching **Wimbledon** (BBC, both channels, interminably) without a gin and tonic in my hand. I don't mean that an air of genteel and suburban conformity had come over the players this year — there were still enough tantrums and rude gestures and swearings from them to keep us happy (they even argued with the electronic 'bleeper' as if it were a blind linesman) — it was just the effect of listening to the commentators.

I could imagine them, sweltering in the heat in their double breasted blazers, buttons polished and a club badge on the pocket. All around them was evidence of the commercialisation of Wimbledon, with firms paying huge sums to have their products on display and companies paying a fortune to erect marquees and entertain clients (Centre Court tickets guaranteed). One top official has even profitably sold his 'Scandal of Locker Room Sex' revelations to the Sunday papers. And yet, as far as Dan Maskell and the gang were concerned, the complacent field that is forever England is the green grass of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club.

You could actually hear their eyes mist over when two aged champions, Miss Kitty Gilbert, aged 90, and Jean Borota, presented the trophies on the Finals Days. Here were two champions of old, who never queried a stupid line call or thought the umpire's judgement was lacking.

During the men's semi-final between Lendl and Zivojinovic, there was a decision by the umpire that was so bad even Kitty Gilbert might have objected. It was at a crucial stage in the match, when passions were as high as the temperature, and Zivojinovic exploded with justified anger and helpless rage. As he stormed around, the clucking moral disapproval began from the commentator's box, like a Greek chorus written by a Rotarian: 'Disgraceful, no good will come of this behaviour, you mark my words, you can sense the crowd who were behind him earlier, turning against Zivojinovic after this'. (The last bit was said when the crowd was cheering him on as he impotently forced to have the injustice overturned.) When the controversial point was replayed in slow motion and the injustice was clear for all to see, the chorus managed to be both strident and muted at the same time, anxious to be honest and maintain the status quo simultaneously. 'Well, I must say it did look *in* to me, but of course you must remember the umpire is in the best position to judge these things. Trial by television is not a good thing, in my opinion.'

Heaven knows what the Wimbledon chaps would have made of Ros Franey's film for **First Tuesday** (ITV) about the people in jail for the Guildford pub bombings. This was *trial by television at its best.* As they watched the reams of evidence unfold, heard how confessions are extracted, listened to the alibis the accused claimed to have and learnt how terrorists hell bent on heinous crimes drew attention to themselves by going in for petty crime, you could just hear them muttering uncomfortably, 'Well, it does look as if they are innocent after all, but you have to realise the police are closer to the action, and they know best . . .'

It's quite possible that Dan Maskell *et al* would find something nice to say even about **Points of View** (BBC1), although it would tax them severely. A friend recently went to work in America and we were trying to compile an imaginary video of the best and worst of British television. There was much debate about the programmes that would make him miss the box, but there was unanimous agreement about the show that would make him look forward to a diet of quiz games: *Points Of View* with Barry Took.

It's impossible to accept the pre-Peacock arguments coming from the BBC about its duty to the public, when the only forum for the viewers, the public, to comment on the programmes provided is this smug little ten-minute slot, presided over by Mr Took, who makes the word 'unctuous' seem more than usually onomatopoeic. People don't write to the BBC to comment on a particular, they write to *Points Of View* to get their names read out over the air, and they structure their letters so they will get to appear on the screen. This is quite easy: you just use phrases like 'quality of the first order', 'was enthralled by the

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programme from start to finish . . . a warm thank you to all concerned'. If you say, 'Please pass on my congratulations', a leering Mr Took will invariably say 'It'll be a great pleasure, no sooner said than done.'

Points Of View is a very safe programme and very unlikely to be taken off. The department responsible for it is the Presentation Department. This is the one which produces the little trailers telling you what's on the other channel, or what's on the cover of this week's *Radio Times*. A ten-minute programme is not very much for the folk at Current Affairs, but it's a lifetime if your normal output is a few seconds. And Presentation is hanging on to them.

There are some signs, moreover, that the Presentation Department is getting bigger. It certainly seems to have taken over **Wogan** (BBC1). I couldn't quite understand what Jeffrey Archer was doing on the show last week; Terry didn't seem interested in asking him about his new novel. Mr Archer told a story about how warm and human Mrs Thatcher was because she had Downing Street ring him when she noticed he'd left his raincoat behind (did he really expect us to believe that she passed the coat stand on her way out and recognised his coat and said 'Oh dear me' like a female Dan Maskell? Give over Jeffrey). Mr Wogan, of course, just wanted an anecdote, he wasn't interested in its accuracy. So what was Archer doing on the show?

It all became clear when I saw the programme lists for the weekend. Mr Archer was scheduled to talk about himself to Richard Baker. On the other BBC channel. □

MUSIC

Hollow men

Andrew Clements

Super-trendiness . . . self-obsession . . . both led to much the same result for Italian music at this year's Almeida Festival

ITALIAN NEW MUSIC came to the Almeida, for the final week of the month-long festival, in the shape of Giacinto Scelsi and Sylvano Bussotti. Born in 1905, Scelsi was totally unknown here until Adrian Jack's MusICA series introduced programmes of his music in the late 1970s; since then a number of influential critics and composers have taken up his cause and there is the suggestion that no less a composer than György Ligeti may have been influenced by some of Scelsi's ideas.

The ICA concerts, which included string quartets, solo instrumental pieces and the vocal cycle *Canti di Capricorno*, left me baffled by the claims made on Scelsi's behalf. The Almeida's double-decker evening offered more of the smaller-scale chamber works, as well as four works for chamber orchestra. Performances by the Arditti Quartet and the pianist Yvar Mikhashoff, all of whom have worked with the composer, as well as Music Projects/London, promised to be definitive, while the composer himself broke his carefully studied reclusiveness in Rome and Sicily to attend the concert, and even to give an undeniably charming introduction to one of the pieces. If the light was ever going to dawn, I felt, it was surely going to be this time.

Well it didn't; if anything, it served only to harden attitudes and to turn agnosticism into downright disbelief. Whatever the musical language a composer elects to use, he has to produce convincing and satisfying ideas to sustain each of his pieces. Scelsi's music appeals to a particular new-music faction because it dispenses with traditional trappings like thematicism and development; it is designed as an art of contemplation, peering into the nature of the sound he creates, without heed of clock time or rhythm. It is an attractive prospect which, theoretically, could produce music of great power and concentration.

Stockhausen's *Stimmung* is perhaps the most accomplished piece of musical contemplation Western art has produced in the modern age. But what Stockhausen creates, unlike Scelsi, is musical ideas; in half a dozen works at the Almeida there was scarcely one worthwhile invention. Four works, extraordinarily, began in precisely the same way: two string quartets, a string trio and a piece for 16 strings all set off with gentle meanderings in microtones around a central pitch and, apart from varying intensity and register, proceeded along the same blinkered track without subtlety of rhythm, or harmony, or timbre.

For years Scelsi laboured away without performances, producing an immense body of music. It's impossible not to feel that in that time he lost touch totally with his potential audience, that music became for him an entirely private occupation in which he could work out his own essentially intimate and limited ideas on music. Sudden fame, on however small a scale, has done him little good; at 80 it's unlikely he could respond to the challenge of writing music that would set out to engage and challenge the public.

Bussotti, in total contrast, has always been absolutely aware of his public image; indeed it's arguable that his music is all image and little substance. Belonging to the generation (born in 1931) that inherited post-Webernian serialism, he has faithfully followed all the musical fashions of the last 30 years, from total serialism through Cageian indeterminism, music theatre and, most recently, neo-romanticism. Last Saturday the Almeida mounted a day of Bussotti, which included the premiere of *Pianobar pour Phèdre*, a reworking of his most recent theatre piece *Le Racine*; but, two days earlier, the Arditti Quartet offered four of his chamber works, in which the theatricality was minimised and in which the abilities of Bussotti as a musical inventor pure and simple were put to the test.

Pieces like the *Gran Duo* and *Three Lovers' Ballet* of 1978 demonstrate how well he has put together a fundamentally tonal language in the last decade, just as convincing superficially as the serial-inspired gestures of the 1960 *Phrase à trois* and 1971 *Quartetto Gramsci*. Bussotti essentially is a dedicated follower of musical fashion, an image of reality got up in exotic, highly perfumed garb, but ultimately as bereft of musical ideas as Scelsi. In that respect two composers so unalike on the surface showed a fundamental similarity, which cannot have been what the Almeida Festival had in mind at all. □

Gimme Gimme (A Man After Midnight
THE LEATHER NUN
Wire

The received view is that covering Abba songs is patronising. I disagree: the halting Eurospeak of the original lyrics gives rise to all kinds of interesting disjunctions — and that's what we like. In this version by another Swedish group — who have successfully dedicated themselves to continuing the out-on-the-edge legacy of Iggy Pop — the original expression of female lust is turned into a (homo) sexual ode to dread: not cheap thrills but a reaffirmation of *difference*. Back-up theory: 'I've always felt that one of the secret strengths of rock'n'roll was that it provided a voice for the forgotten and disenfranchised.' (Dave Marsh in *Fortunate Son*, Random House, 1985).

The Queen Is Dead
THE SMITHS
Rough Trade

The above maxim also informs much of the Smiths' work. It's still reassuring — in the age of the pop star as yuppie — to hear from people who are concerned with the world outside the studio. Apart from the pertinent Monarchy mockery of the title track, this fourth LP continues, and sharpens, Morrissey's dissertations on loneliness, sexuality and gender. Part of his appeal lies in the public working out of his adolescence and the sexual ambiguities (hinted at by the punning title) that this throws up. Harnessed to some excellent, sympathetic playing and witty lyrics, this is powerful stuff for an audience itself arrested in adolescence. Over 40 minutes, it's slightly wearing — one more fast song would have suited my taste — but what is most heartening is the Smiths' sympathy for the underdog, whether vicars in tutus or those who can't or won't subscribe to artificial 'norms'. Best line: 'Love is Natural and Real/But not for you, my love.'

Jon Savage

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Sew far, sew good

Naseem Khan

AUDLEY END recently looked like a page from an outdated tourists' guide to Britain: acres of immaculate lawn (vistas courtesy of Capability Brown); a slim River Cam sliding under an Adam bridge; and all leading up to the serene splendours of 17th-century Audley End House.

In the middle distance, a slow game of cricket was being played in the hazy summer sun. Nearer the house, by the shade of the high box hedge and around various marquees, strolled scores of sensible, unglamorous women in the uniform of the Englishwoman out of Town: the carefully limp, floral dress; the flat sandals. Just some of the 8,000 who flocked this year to the National Patchwork Championships, they would seem to confirm the stereotype of the patchwork-maker as a middle-class and middle-aged Anglo-Saxon, the sort of competent woman who could run up a quilt between making jam and tending the herbaceous border. Is this unkind? Is it untrue?

No, said Juliet Webster, the Championships' organiser, amiably: there was probably much to that. Although quilting was traditionally a working-class art in South Wales and the North-East — and a useful way of supplementing meagre family incomes — market forces have changed the picture. The eiderdown killed off the practicalities of the hand-made quilt and, although there are some that still aim to make a living from quilts (like the impressive members of Quilt Art), quilting has generally become more recreational than economic.

Nevertheless, it's a popular art, as the crowds at Audley End bore witness, and indiscriminate in its geography. Coach parties turned up at the house from Leicestershire, Devon and further; distinctive Yorkshire voices could clearly be heard in the marquees. The 300 or so quilts sent in to Juliet Webster came from far and wide, a few from overseas. Each year of the Championships' life has seen a rise in numbers. At first — nine years ago — the quilts fitted on to the Websters' washing-line outside their Norfolk country quilting business. Now they are too many even for Audley End's Great Hall. The bulk are to be found in the tent outside.

It's like the Arabian Nights, inside that vast marquee: hot and vivid, packed with panels of quilts. You walk through a multicoloured maze: fabrics and patterns and large conceits gleaming in the overwhelming, airless heat. Here, you find yourself among appliqué work (a busy scene of Barnstaple Market, 10ft by 8ft, hits the eye); there, among 36 cot covers (alphabets, animals, flowers). Here's a section for the over-70s — a particularly strong set of entries this year, with a prize-winning Amish-inspired quilt, that incorporates an illusionistic element, from Elizabeth Hitchman — and there are the equally interesting 'group' quilts.

There are school groups too (though less than I'd like), from compiled primary school quilts, with kids making their own panels of spooks and dinosaurs, to a familiarly saccharine hearts-and-lace design from a set of 14-year-old girls. It is so hot in the tent that sweat runs down people's faces. The far-sighted brandish little rush fans to and fro, but most people mill on resolutely, catalogue in hand, from quilt to quilt to quilt.

I cannot remember having been among a more critical crowd of people at an exhibition. Although there were quilts around that took my breath away nobody here was going to get bowled over. They sniffed. They dissected. They analysed. They stopped before Marianne Wilkinson's large, appliquéd tulips. 'Yes . . . but her quilting isn't terribly good.' Patricia Gibbons's entry had a curvy tree on whose leaves family members' names and dates had been embroidered. Made for her parents' golden wedding, it had taken her 300 hours. 'Grotesque,' snapped a spectator.

In the great house itself — mercifully cool and stone — there was a mixed selection, from patchwork to group quilts. Again, the approach varied: some traditional, symetrical and abstract; some (though fewer) using representation. In pride of place stood an illustrative 'Shaka, King of the Zulus', made by the Zamani Soweto Sisters' Council. Some drew on natural life — 'Sunshine and Shade', a lovely abstract quilt from Dartmoor, moved from rich sombre colours into a luminous white, beige and gold centre — others, like the detailed Stoke Poges Wall Hanging, celebrated local history.

But there's more to each quilt than the finished product. Purposes affect designs. Many of the quilts were made to commemorate special family occasions and the show's catalogue, containing the makers' own entries, elliptically refers to all sorts of involvements, setbacks and half-expressed pride. The design of Hilda Tanner's 'Giant Pink Dahlia' was, she wrote, 'chosen by my 13-year-old granddaughter'. There are quilts made for departures, for old age, for anniversaries and for friendship. All human life — almost — is here.

Because the Patchwork Championships are open entry and not pre-selected, the work is variable (which adds interest), from kids and beginners to extreme sophisticates in design and technique. This complements the annual spring show of the Quilters' Guild, which brings together only the best of members' regional shows. The Patchwork Championships are a broad church. The only thing they do not have this year, said Juliet Webster regretfully, is a quilt by a man. □

No more superheroes

Roz Kaveney

Superman's backing Reagan, Batman needs therapy and Robin's a girl: down at DC Comics, something stirs

THE TRICK WAS NEVER the gaudy costumes and the onomatopoeic sound effects: they were merely the stuff from which quick misunderstandings could be derived by cultural commentators not that concerned with getting it right, but who felt that they had to say something.

The analogies with movies never really worked either: if you make the comparison that direct, then comic books are crippled, no matter how skilfully artists like Gene Colan could mimic the fluidity of screen action in their frame-by-frame shots of masked crimefighters' aerial acrobatics. What really suggested that there was a worthwhile form here was the odd effect that words and pictures conceived as a unity have on the audience's sense of duration. Movies take place in something that appears to be real time, making it hard to follow through on the promise of techniques like split screen, but, because the reader determines the pace at which detail is perceived, different actions alternating across the pages of a comic book can have a rather more successfully fugal force. And, subject to commercial constraints, a page can be loaded with signifiers to which one can return without

endless freeze-frame and fast forward facilities, merely by a quick flick of the wrist.

For a generation now, America's DC Comics have been losing out to their major commercial rival, Marvel, in spite of controlling the rights to perhaps the most famous of superheroes, Batman and Superman. Both companies face the threat of an expanding network of small independents and a general decline in sales. Accordingly, and memorably, DC have given the newer generation of writers and artists their head. Writers like Alan Moore and Frank Miller are not especially delighted at working for an audience mainly interested in wrestling bouts between men in skintight costumes, but both are conscious enough of their debt to the traditional superhero comic to want to

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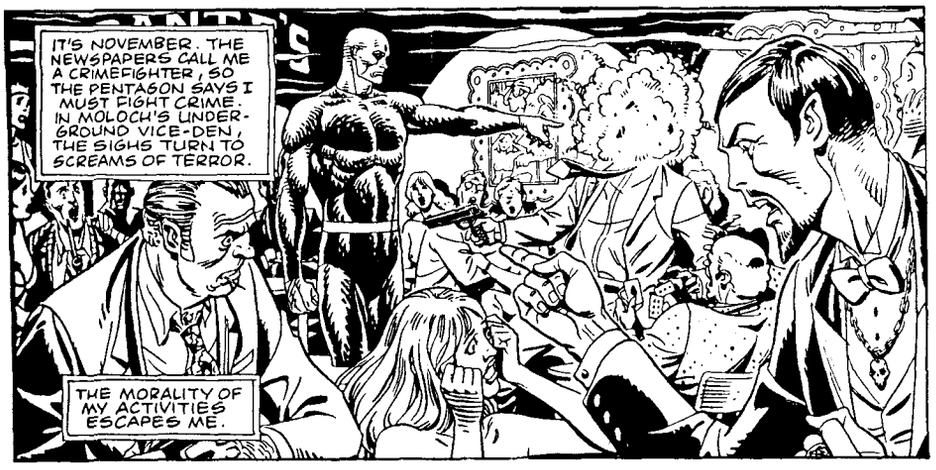
IT'S NOVEMBER. THE NEWSPAPERS CALL ME A CRIMEFIGHTER, SO THE PENTAGON SAYS I MUST FIGHT CRIME. IN MOLOCH'S UNDERGROUND VICE-DEN, THE SIGHS TURN TO SCREAMS OF TERROR.
THE MORALITY OF MY ACTIVITIES ESCAPES ME.

redefine and subvert it.

When superhero and masked crimefighter comics first became popular in the late Thirties and early Forties, they fitted in with a basic American tendency to Manichaeism, a tendency exacerbated by World War Two. Later the comics incorporated the neuroses of the Fifties, the Sixties' pursuit of cosmic awareness and the paranoia of the Seventies. Moore's *Watchmen* (whose first issue has already sold 200,000 copies), an embittered comic about superheroes, is also bitter and ambivalent about that legacy. Moore and artist Dave Gibbons show us an alternate world in which the craze for comics has led to a Thirties fad for masked crimefighters — a fad like pole-squatting, but more socially dangerous. As Hollis Mason, the Original Nite Owl, says, 'They've called us fascists and they've called us perverts and while there's an element of truth in both those accusations, neither of them are big enough to take in the whole picture.'

By the Eighties of Moore's world, vigilantes have been banned after a police strike and the majority are now mild eccentrics who reminisce about the good old days. But not the psychotic outlaw Rorschach or the government thug The Comedian, whose brutal murder acts as a hook for the series. And certainly not the one authenticated superpowered hero, Dr Manhattan. (One of the neatest of Gibbons's quiet visual gags is the way we first assume Manhattan's casual changes of size from human to titanic to be clumsy perspective, and then doubletake.) *Watchmen*'s projected 12 issues feature a clock on the back and clock symbols throughout: it is the nuclear clock and when, in the forthcoming third issue, the Russians move to root out US advisers in Afghanistan, midnight is near. And what price crimefighters then?

It is easy to respond to the ironies of Moore's pictures, cheap as some of them are; he is so skilled at throwaway reassessments of expectations that the angry comment on comic-book tradition is almost lost in our response to the technique. Other as yet almost subliminal moments from this fascinating series include a 'Stick With Dick in '84' poster in the background of Rorschach's paranoid musings and strong indications in every street and bar scene that this is a world where the Surgeon-General's report on smoking never happened either. And among all the clues to the nature of these mutations are the more orthodox ones of a detective story. Who did kill The Comedian? And does it matter?

Most of the time, Moore is creating and commenting upon his own icons; the shock effect from those more familiar, like the Afghanistan headline, comes from their recontextualisation. Frank Miller's best-selling *Dark Knight* plays variations on a mythology with which we have grown up: his Batman is well into middle-age, long retired, but driven back to being a vigilante by needs which fit the pattern of repressions long denied. Early in the first issue he is waylaid by the teen punk Mutant gang — 'I don't know man, he's into it. Can't do murders when they're into it' — and is soon back swinging from rooftops to the horror of both the liberal mayor and criminal community.

The villains of *Dark Knight* include not only street thugs and master criminals,but also a president — not named, but drawn as Reagan — who says 'Now there's been a lot of loose talk about nuclear war' and a Superman who is his willing accomplice. Miller's dialogue is less elliptically elegant than Moore's, but his scripts are often darkly funny: the Mutants' war cry is 'Slice and Dice' and the interplay between Batman and Carrie — a computerwhizz teenager who imposes herself on him as the new Robin — comes close enough to standard child-parent politics to amuse while defusing both psychosexual analysis or accusations of mere modishness.

For all his ambiguitites and angst, in the end Miller may do as little fundamentally to question the comic form as did Marvel's Stan Lee when he first gave Spiderman a neurosis, but his sheer effort to do so commands respect. Neither *Dark Knight* not *Watchmen* are proof of comics' coming of age. But they're a sign that they have at least entered a creative phase of adolescent rebellion.

Watchmen *and* Dark Knight *are available from specialist comic shops or through the mail-order department of Forbidden Planet, 23 Denmark Street, WC1.*

Judoka

Geoff Dyer

The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America
MARTIN AMIS *Cape* £9.95

YOU EXPECT certain writers to be good on certain other writers: Leavis on Johnson, Raymond Williams on Orwell. Who do you expect Martin Amis to be good on? Martin Amis? He's even good on himself when he's being good on someone else — Gore Vidal, for instance: 'the cleverest book-reviewer in the world . . . He is too clever . . . to be an effective novelist. Essays are what he is good at: you can't be too clever for them.'

His verdict on wank mags in *Money* — yob art — is also the best generic description of his own novels. Running on a high-octane fuel of piss and vinegar abuse they appeal to literary-minded folk who daydream of threatening someone with a broken bottle but faint at the sight of blood. They're full of good jokes and vivid scenes but you hardly mind if friends return them to you dog-eared and beer-stained; it all seems quite appropriate.

Amis's novels may not seem much like literature but his journalism does; *The Moronic Inferno* — a collection of pieces on American writers, themes and places — is his best book yet. A very modern irony, that — journalism getting nearer to the mark than the real stuff — and one Amis is probably alert to since he is that curious thing, a distinctly modern person of letters. Now that controversy has taken the place of debate, style has gained a momentum all of its own, but Amis is authoritative as well as stylish. His distinctive voice is somewhere between T. S. Eliot and a pop video. It is also very transatlantic — but why the special interest in American letters?

American men of letters have a more interesting time of it: boozing, brawling, wielding influence like a cosh. When a writer in England becomes successful, says Amis in one of three variations on this joke, he [sic] buys a filing cabinet; in America he 'acquires a new life'. Sounds good, doesn't it? But since, in parts of America at least, 'a game of scrabble is a literary event' there is a lot to be said for shuttling back and forth across the ocean as an *Anglo*-American.

Amis doesn't do much brawling while he's over there. In his profiles — of Steinem, Vidal, Capote, De Palma, Bellow, Spielberg — he is discreet, polite. His subjects seem to take to him and, back home behind the typewriter, Amis brings them back to glimpsed and vivid life from the taped ghosts of their voices. Throughout, his fluency, wit, insight and quality of judgement ('Most of Burroughs is trash, and lazily obsessive trash too . . .') are hard to beat. Every few pages you have the distinctly unpleasant sensation that you are turning into Martin's dad in those adverts: thinking to yourself, now *that's* what I call good writing.

His style is parodic and detached, affable and sharp. The easy flow of the prose is arrested by the startling word (both Mailer and Didion are said to 'gouge' a book out of themselves: a very Amisian word, gouge) and sudden inversions:

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'During the second part of the interview [Hefner] relaxed: that is to say, he became highly agitated . . .' Amis may not be a brawler but he has evolved a kind of literary judo where his antagonist's own efforts do most of the work — most famously in the catchweight bout that left Mailer huffing and puffing. Here he quotes a little seduction fantasy of Paul Theroux's:

> 'At her age she could know every trick in the book and, if it weren't for her pride . . . she could probably make a fortune as a hooker.' *Cor.* The seduction takes place in the south of France. On a train.

Ea-*sy*! Ea-*sy*! In the same way, however, Amis's own efforts can be turned against himself: his creative work fails the acid test of his criticism. In a postscript he reflects on how writing the piece on AIDS led him to be shocked when he saw the word 'faggot' in a story he had just published. 'The locution was *right for the narrator and right for the story*; but I shouldn't have used it.' Perhaps it was the wrong kind of story. Perhaps, also, that 'seizure of remorse' may extend itself to consider the whole locutory masquerade of misogyny, rape, viciousness and brutality — the overwhelming contempt — that is the cumulative and distinctive feature of his fiction to date. □

Old-fashioned values

Eva Figes

REPRINTS OF FORGOTTEN or half-forgotten women writers now form a major branch of feminist publishing — one on which the immense success of Virago, in particular, is based. And although there is bound to be a certain amount of dross among the gold now being dredged up for our perusal, who cares as long as the gold comes to light?

Among the reprints I have been reading the pure gold shone in Coral Sandel's **Selected Short Stories** (£7.95), translated from the Norwegian by Barbara Wilson and published in the US by Seal Press (distributed here by Airlift). Sandel was born in 1880 and died at a very ripe old age in 1974, but all the writing here has a timeless quality. These are stories of such absolute authenticity, so beautifully understated, that it is hard to think of them as fiction at all, and the translations are also impeccable. She is most like Mansfield, with a similar feeling for childhood and an oblique feminism which shows itself in subtle irony. Her sympathies are wide and in fact the character who stands out most vividly in these delectable pages is a caged parrot called Papen.

Edith Wharton has been rescued from neglect for some time now and Virago have just reissued two of her later novels. **The Mother's Recompense** (1925; £3.95) concerns the moral dilemma of a society lady who returns to New York after many years in disgrace on the French Riviera (where she eloped to get away from a stifling marriage), when her daughter unknowingly decides to marry a man with whom she herself has had an affair. Though written with finesse, the plot is predictable very early on and a theme which might have seemed daring in 1890 has a whiff of Victorian mothballs about it now (and probably did in 1925) which gives the borrowed title from a 'decorous' predecessor a double irony.

Hudson River Bracketed (1929; £4.95) is written with rather less finesse and an excess of purple passages. Perhaps its concern with current literary fashions was provoked by Wharton's own increasing estrangement from contemporary writing, modernism in particular. It is a portrait of an artist as a young man, but her writer hero has a very old-fashioned talent and the novel is full of disgruntled jeers at the New York literary scene. Her book seems backward looking in other ways, with its echoes of *David Copperfield*. The young writer is first saddled with a hopeless wife, who conveniently dies on him, so that he can marry his supportive Muse. All of which is rather more forgiveable in Dickens, who did not have a clue about women, than it is in Edith Wharton, who knew so much.

The other two Virago reprints are on a much lower literary level but provide an interesting contrast to each other in their views of the independent woman. Ellen Glasgow's **Barren Ground** (1925; £4.50) is an immensely wordy and overwritten novel, detrimentally influenced by Hardy, about a young girl who is jilted and betrayed and, instead of becoming the conventional victim, returns to her native Virginia to work the land. Dour, self-righteous, she gradually goes up in the world as her lover goes down, ruined by weakness and drink. The heroine broods endlessly on the death of love, but is unable to forget it, nor does she succeed in loving again.

Dorothy Canfield's **Her Son's Wife** (1926; £3.95) gives us a very different message. Her heroine is already middle-aged, loveless, independent and horribly self-righteous when the story begins. But when her son foolishly marries an unhappy slut who gives birth to a daughter, Mrs Bascomb makes gargantuan sacrifices to ensure that her granddaughter has a future worth having. In the process she learns that love is more effective and rewarding than self-righteousness, but then her husband was a good man who left her by dying, not for another woman. It is an improbable story, but a nice idea, written with refreshing irony and directness, and I must say I found Canfield's version of superwoman more interesting than Ellen Glasgow's. □

Hierarchical problem solving

Peter Harley

She's arcing, Sir!
down on number t'ree!
a great big jeasly
jumping blue spark!
zapping across
wit a fierce crack!
and losing a certain
amount of power!

She's arcing, is she?
I though as much.
So what the hell
are you doing up here?
Get back below
and fix it at once.
Report to me
when she's normal.

She isn't arcing
any more, Sir.

All right and so what
are you doing up here?

SHORT STORIES

Do it yourself

Adewale Maja-Pearce

A Forest of Flowers
KEN SARO-WIWA *Saros*
dist. *Third World Books* £7.95

THE OTHER DAY a Nigerian friend of mine, a political journalist with a weekly magazine, announced that he was planning to write a book. He intended to tackle the problem of corruption. He would publish it himself and sell it for 'two-two naira'. It was strictly a business proposition. There is a vitality about such a pragmatic approach to the world of books which, profoundly democratic and lacking the snobbery and insularity of the British literary scene, is the life-blood of literature itself.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, the latest of such publisher-writers, is committed, besides, to maintaining high literary standards. Already well-known as a novelist, poet and newspaper columnist, he has produced in *A Forest of Flowers* his first collection of short stories.

The themes of his stories are as varied as Nigeria itself: the brutality of urban life; religious intolerance; the disparity between rich and poor; corruption and nepotism in the public sphere. The contradictions of this huge, unsettled and diverse country — 100 million people, 350 languages, two major religions —

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are caught in a series of understated scenes from the lives of ordinary people. Although his English is at times heavy-handed, his use of pidgin — 'rotten English' he calls it — gives some of the stories an unusual and refreshing quality, already evident in his novel *Sozaboy* (1985). □

FICTION

The servant problem

Adrianne Blue

The Shrapnel Academy
FAY WELDON *Hodder* £8.95

FAY WELDON'S MAIDEN name, which she never uses, is the same as my married name, which I never use. But what does this seemingly arbitrary and certainly unlikely coincidence reveal? Is it the key to the nature of our respective marriages? Or to our respective feminisms — am I more radical, or is she sweeter and less cantankerous?

And are we cousins by marriage? If so, would she write a pleasant plug for one of the blither manuscripts mouldering in my desk drawer?

There are two reasons why I call your attention to our nominal connection. One, I no longer know the proper function of a book review (but we'll get to that). Two, it is, dear reader, a Weldonian situation. A freakish coincidence rife with implication. Funny.

But what exactly is humour? What makes the *Shrapnel Academy* funny? Oh yes, it is; it's a grim, funny book; wonderful too.

In pursuing humour — or comedy, or wit (journalism is a sloppy business, no need to define our terms) — certain pitfalls lurk for the unwary. Humour is unbelievable. As that old bottom-slapper P. G. Wodehouse once said, 'credulity is not wooed'. Rather, comedy is an arch 'game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women'. *The Shrapnel Academy* is a case in point. It is about a dinner party which gets out of hand. Not in the least earnest, even though written by a woman, it is neither about truth or fact; it is about incendiary possibility.

What Cousin Fay has done in this parable of our time is to cause some unlovely people to converge one blizzardy evening at the fictional academy, which is dedicated to that alas utterly historic military shithead, Henry Shrapnel, he who invented the exploding cannonball. The randy, septuagenarian general Leo Makeshift — who is, on the morrow, to deliver the Wellington Lecture — arrives with his blonde-haired young hussy Bella. Then come various members of the military-industrial complex and the women who love them — no flower children, these, either. With so many well-accented, respectable, racist rotters about, rotten things seem likely to happen. And that's only Upstairs.

Downstairs the teeming hordes of Africa and Asia live in some squalor and illegality, but safe from the deportatious authorities. Their self-appointed leader is that masterful hunk, the imperfectly politicised Black butler Acorn, who is quite insane. Cousin Fay plonks in an honourable, bisexual, feminist journalist with a penchant for high heels (why maim the girl?). There is also a golden-haired chauffeur of low intelligence and moderate decency. Do they get together? What an old-fashioned question.

Many people believe that a book review is there to save the reader the trouble of scurrying through an entire novel (life is short). This novel, though, is no trouble and even if you know that the author blows the place up and kills (practically) the lot of them, you could do worse than read how it came to happen. And you'll have to wrangle with your own guilt at not caring that so many are dead. Fay Weldon makes it plain why. Are you worthy? Or ought you to suffer the same carnage? Surely you'll want to ponder too the wry philosophy: 'What is sport, but warfare without blood? What else computers, but thought without guilt?'

Fay Weldon is not above cannibalising her old works: whole paragraphs have sometimes reappeared. Here, instead, she re-uses a tried and true structural gimmick (that is no slur) which works, though not so well as in *Puffball*. There, amid the psychological bric-a-brac of one woman's pregnancy, is inserted a chronicle of the biological facts of everywoman's pregnancy; in *The Shrapnel Academy*, capsule summaries of the great battles and battlers of history are profferred like vitamins during the mounting hostilities of dinner and afters. Soon you long for another morsel of the academy's caribou patty or a sip of dry dialogue.

Weldon realises it too. Unwilling to give up on her structure (and why should she?) she cajoles: 'Reader, you now fear you are going to hear all about Gustavus Adolphus. How right you are.'

But to get back to parables, to stories with a message which charm even while they instruct. We think of Aesop. Or to get back to comedy. We think of Evelyn Waugh. Why, I wonder, don't we think of Rose Macaulay who surely is Fay Weldon's mentor. The guerrilla warfare of Macaulay's wily and wise and biting novel *Potterism* (1920) set the ironic tone of a 50-year oeuvre in which, when compared to men, women characters were 'just a shade the cleverer', though the world treated them like zombies. The prose, which probably didn't sound quite so stylised in the Twenties and Thirties, is honed and brittle and pert like Fay Weldon's. Macaulay even wrote *Letters to a Friend* and *Letters to a Sister* — not a far titter

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from Weldon's engrossing *Letters to Alice*.

In choosing a mistress instead of a master to apprentice herself to, Weldon got it exactly, but exactly, right. And maybe it was unconscious (I think not) and maybe there is a little Muriel Spark there too.

I am not trying to confine Fay Weldon to a feminist ghetto. What I am saying is that not only did she voice, with exhilarating candour, the feminist consciousness which arose in Britain in the 1970s, she latched onto the comic tradition in women's writing. Women have always had a sense of humour; particularly feminists, who would need it, wouldn't they?

Cousin Fay is a major writer. In *The Shrapnel Academy*, she is, as ever, witty, honest, vicious. □

Reason to believe

William Outhwaite

Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas
ed. PETER DEWS *Verso* £18.50 & £5.95

PERHAPS THE BEST way of introducing the philosopher Jürgen Habermas to readers not familiar with his work is to say that, if he lived in Britain, he might well be a frequent contributor to the *New Statesman*. He is better known here for his theoretical studies than for his substantial political writings which, he insists, 'obey less restrictive rules than those of academic work'. The publication of these interviews, spanning the last six or seven years, is therefore particularly welcome, since they provide an excellent introduction to both aspects of his work and to the links between them.

Habermas, now in his late fifties, grew up under the Nazi dictatorship. After a brief period as a freelance journalist, he worked in the universities of Heidelberg and Frankfurt (where he returned in 1983) and in a research institute near Munich. Despite the massive volume and range of his work over the past 20-odd years, it displays a remarkable continuity in its essential direction.

Habermas' basic project can be described in theoretical terms as a reconstruction of historical materialism, or as an attempt to carry on the intentions of the earlier generation of 'critical theory' by other means. Politically, his abiding concern has been to preserve and extend rational political debate, in the face of trends towards the 'scientisation of politics' and what he now describes as the 'colonisation' of the world of everyday life by increasingly autonomous systems governed by market and administrative rationality.

What was wrong, in Habermas' view, with traditional Marxism and critical theory? The revolutionary optimism of the former, as expressed for instance in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, had to be abandoned; Habermas tells us here that he read Lukács' book in the Fifties 'both with fascination and regret that these things belonged to the past'. And the 'critical theory' of what in post-war Germany came to be known as the 'Frankfurt School', which Habermas encountered as Adorno's assistant? Critical theory, he would argue, had rightly given up on the prospect of proletarian revolution, but Adorno and Horkheimer had painted themselves into a corner of virtual despair — what Lukács called the 'Grand Hotel of the Abyss'. They had turned Marxism's optimistic philosophy of history into an equally untenable negative utopia, with themselves as last-ditch defenders of a traditional conception of reason and the political values which it grounded. In so doing, they had neglected the positive aspects of empirical science and bourgeois democracy.

Habermas, by contrast, has always wanted to restore a 'public sphere' for rational discussion of moral and political values, in the context of a social theory of modernity — a theory which incorporates and builds on the best of modern sociology, psychology and linguistics. This 'theory of communicative action' (the title of his massive book of 1981) forms the basis of his more directly political interventions.

Habermas has said very little explicitly about socialism — he concedes that he should not talk about it 'only in interviews' — and yet I believe he is one of the most important socialist thinkers in Western Europe. He continues to describe himself as a Marxist and not only out of solidarity with the victims of intellectual and administrative pogroms in the Federal Republic. Whereas his earlier critiques were directed at social scientific positivism and systems theory and the related 'scientisation' of politics, he has recently directed his fire at post-structuralist thinkers in France and elsewhere who have, in his view, given up too easily the Enlightenment concept of reason. (See Peter Dews's outstanding introduction to this volume). We need this concept of rational discussion to get us out of the current crisis of the post-war welfare state and the sterile debates between the partisans of market and bureaucratic 'solutions'. As one might expect, then, Habermas is cautiously sympathetic to the attempts of the new social movements to extend democracy into these and other areas of social and personal life. What is needed, he says, is to develop 'capacities for self reorganisation' which can 'hold the systematic imperatives of economic system and state apparatus in check'. This requires 'a gradual abolition of the capitalist labour market, and . . . a radical democratic implantation of political parties in their public spheres'.

What remains unclear, both to Habermas and to his readers, is how this might actually be achieved. Negatively, he suggests that the contradictions of the capitalist welfare state may in the long run give rise to more radical initiatives — especially under the impact of neo-conservatism à la Thatcher/Kohl/Reagan. For the moment, it seems, we must get along with whatever radical fragments are available, including even West Germany's lamentable SPD. Asked by *New Left Review* if he could conceive of reassuming a more active political role, Habermas replies with characteristic caution: 'Were I to rule that out, I would be someone other than the person I would wish to be.' □

Footnotes

A MONTH AGO the French daily *Libération* devoted 16 pages to a dossier on the **Marquis de Sade**. 'The Return of the Divine Marquis' included essays, interviews, a floor-plan of his chateau at La Coste, even an Identikit picture, since, apart from one doubtful Van Loo sketch, no portrait survives.

It was all to celebrate the latest boom in Sade publishing. The first three volumes of a 16-volume Collected Works have just appeared, edited by Jean-Jacques Pauvert — who started republishing Sade back in 1947 — and Annie Le Brun. Another six volumes (letters, plays, poems) are on their way from Fayard, partly compiled by Thibault de Sade — perhaps the first of the family to take pride in his ancestry. And there'll soon be two new biographies.

Sade's rehabilitation, begun by Apollinaire and Maurice Heine, seems complete. Indeed Annie Le Brun, still surrealist after all these years, now wants to return us to the 'revolutionary' power of the texts themselves, to save Sade from his interpreters, of whom there have been many. De Beauvoir, Bataille, Barthes, Lacan, Deleuze, Kristeva . . . appreciation of Sade is probably the one thing uniting all notable French intellectuals since the Thirties.

In '57 Pauvert was fined for his Sadean endeavours and the books were burnt; 15 years on, you could find Sade's novels in any bookshop, in mass-market paperback from publishers 10/18. Many more manuscripts have since been unearthed, thanks largely to Gilbert Lely, Sade's passionately partisan biographer, who died last year. Le Brun praises Sade's irrepressible desire to 'say everything': 27 years' captivity gave him the time to do so. His output was vast.

But don't count on *Justine* becoming a Penguin Classic in the near future. Sade publishing here has a briefer and less inspiring history, reaching its nadir in the Sixties with a paperback whose cover bore a single pink breast and the line 'the man who gave sex a new word'. Inside, de Beauvoir's essay 'Must We Burn Sade?' was added to random extracts from the novels, with every sexual reference left in French. Today, apart from four stories recently reissued by Peter Owen, not a single book by Sade is available. American Grove Press editions of *Juliette*, *Justine* and *120 Days of Sodom* occasionally slip through Customs.

It's hard to know whether British publishers are uninformed or over-cautious of prosecution. Maybe would-be censors have more to fear. In Greece six years ago a public prosecutor banned Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. When he was assassinated by leftist guerillas a few months later, some said it was just coincidence . . .

Malcolm Imrie

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Family fortunes

Diana Eden

'WE ARE CONSIDERED the slag-heap of the services. There is prestige in working for the Home Office or the War Office, but there's certainly none in working for the DHSS.'

Pale of face and weary, the Social Security visitor sat at my kitchen table. At eleven o'clock I was her third call of the morning; she had four more visits to make before returning to write up case notes in her office and her day, which had started at 7.30, would probably end at eight.

So we drank coffee while she established that I was *not*, as so many unemployed single-parents are, isolated, friendless or depressed and I established that *she*, despite her daunting work-load, was the embodiment of gutsy, positive compassion. Owing to cuts, she said, her work now frequently extended into areas formerly the exclusive province of social workers. And, yes, she did find it difficult to adopt the self-preserving discipline of switching off at the end of her working day. On the contrary, it was hard *not* to transport other people's worries home with her.

One such worry is young and blind, confined to a wheelchair and living alone in lamentable conditions, yet remains resistant to the notion of registering with a doctor, accepting a home-help or even allowing someone to cook the occasional hot meal. Among her other clients are, predictably, the frail and elderly house-bound, often beset by that generational mixture of humility and pride which inhibits them from 'troubling the doctor'. It was not unknown for her to be entreated to have a bash at diagnosing symptoms . . .

Clearly, by comparison with cases such as these, I must have represented light, if not comic relief. Black comedy had, in fact, been visited upon my doorstep only the previous week in the shape of my brother — also unemployed — who had hitched down from the North of England to treat me to four days of his bitter wit and wisdom.

My brother lives in Cleveland, an area which, as any Northern wag will tell you, is now twin-towned with Hiroshima. A motor mechanic for 20 years, he has been out of work for 18 months and is beginning, fatalistically, to view his situation as a form of pre-premature retirement: 'I've stepped aside to make way for a school-leaver.' He and I both understand the irony of that remark. The 16-year-old daughter of friends of ours landed a job in a Northern shop for which there had been just the 450 applications.

My brother, married with two small children, has all but given up scanning the 'Situations Vacant' columns in his local paper. Supplementary benefit equals the official poverty-line (as Master Matthew Parris found out for himself when he tried existing on it for a hedonistic week); nevertheless, many advertised jobs persist in offering enticing wages even below that heady level.

The bleakness of our conversation and mutual state of mind was interrupted by the appearance of our family's Great White Hope — my son — favouring us with a terrifyingly impressive imitation of The Waking Dead. For it was 'A' level fortnight and the lad needs certain grades to secure his provisional place in the History Faculty at Sussex. But soft! He has heard a whispered rumour that upon the nation's campus carsie walls the words 'History Degrees' are writ large and cruel arrows point towards the lavatory paper. Is it therefore, my son wondered, worth his while to give a shit for academe? Should he bother to revise or to contemplate the horrific prospect of Xmas re-takes if he fails? Should he, perhaps, consider acquiring a practical skill — a YTS course in motor-mechanics for instance? Or should he give up right now and embrace his tempting Alternative Grand Plan: i.e. a life dedicated to sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll? Will my son, too, one day boast his very *own* Social Security visitor? Predictions on a post-card please; the most uplifting response will be rewarded with a one-way ticket to Cleveland.

Incidentally, *my* very own Social Security visitor left the house caffeine refreshed and ready for the fray. She lives, it transpired, in an Outer London Green Belt, next door to a middle-aged City Toff. Last month her neighbour had observed aloud the patently apparent — that she looked utterly exhausted. She'd replied that, yes indeed, she was. 'And so am I,' came his speedy sigh of solidarity, 'I've just spent the entire bloody day organising a golf tournament.' □

Weekend competition

No 2932 **Set by Red Dorn**

Not long now till the Great Wedding and the only question is whether Poet Laureate Ted Hughes will do his duty and honour the occasion in verse. In case he doesn't, here's your chance: the marriage of Fergie and Andrew, in Ted Hughes's style, 12 lines maximum. Deadline (the morning after), 24 July.

No 2929 **Set by Ms de Meaner**

Poems concealing the names of at least ten of the following Clerkenwell pubs and bars: the Crown, the City Pride, the Betsey, Turnmills, the Café St Pierre, the Front Page, the Bleeding Heart, the Castle, the Surprise, the Three Compasses, the Metropolitan, the Gunmaker's Arms, the Penny Black, the Harlequin, the Shakespeare, the Fox and Anchor, the Harrow, the Empress of Russia.

Report **By Red Dorn**

Underpaid left-wing journalists, psychotic meat porters, watchmakers and jewellers and exiled Italian terrorists: historic Clerkenwell's dynamic diversity is celebrated in this year's action-packed festival (11-20 July) — and our competition was a Fuller brewery-backed tie-in. You clearly prefer beer to money, since the entries were among the best ever. First prize, a valuable tankard, to Derek Dunn; second, a brand-new, working clock, to Nina Masel; *lots* of beer to the rest. Roger Woddis reads these and more at 5.30 on 14 July outside the City Pride in Farringdon Lane.

On the back seat of a *Metro, polite and*
uncomplaining,
Penelope, the harlot, plies her trade.
A *shit-heap ride*, and rusting *cars'll* always let the rain
in.
*Hardly quin*tessential love, but quite well paid.

*Sheiks, Peers, crown*ed heads she's courted in her day
(She loathes each or*gan, may curse arms* that caress).
*Penny black*ed the eye (you *bet she* did!) of one that
didn't pay.
*Her rov*ing eye seeks clients, none the less.

She *fucks and hankers* after more, patrolling every
boozer,
Cafés and piers in seaside towns at random.
And thus she'll swell her clientele (quite an
impressive ruse, yah?)
With cash up *front. Pay D*urex for the condom.

DEREK DUNN

Turn, mills of fate — and now, with workers leading,
See how *the crown* of tyranny lies *bleeding*.
Hearts that yearn for freedom — storm *the city*!
Pride must be your watchword; never pity.

Take up *the gunmaker's arms*, and as dawn breaks
Advance until *the castle* stronghold *shakes*.
Spear the Empress of Russia where she lies.
Observe *the harrow*ed visage; *the surprise*.

Be sharp as *the fox, and anchor* all your power
To revolution's great and glorious hour.

But first inform *the metropolitan* press.
Insist on *front page* treatment — nothing less.

NINA MASEL

The *Metropolitan* police force was once the *city pride*
Until they framed poor *Penny Black*; some rotten
copper lied.
It nearly broke my *bleeding heart* to hear folks feign
surprise
When right across the Sun's *front page* ran:
'Bobbies' sad demise'

The *crown* must press for justice and investigate the
case.
Inspector Rook, or *'Castle* Jack,' could soon be in
disgrace.
As *Shakespeare* said: 'Ay there's the rub,' a sling of
fortune's arrow.
With any luck he'll get ten years for running vice in
Harrow.

SID FIELD

Farringdon Road! *Impressive rush-hour* stream
Where *cars all* vie, and *folks in anger* scream
At flash ca*b, leading art*fully, that wreathes
A U-*turn, mills* with throng, while cyclist breathes
U*p any black* and *coughy, sumpy air*
which *all the queuing* passengers must share.
Then, three by *three, come buses* into view;
'Bets 'e don't stop!' *Surprise*, look round, they do —
Three in a row! 'Hey, *mate, you pull! Lets on*
Up front!' Be jolted as it *shakes, peer* down
Through fag smoke (which, say slo*gan makers,*
harms
Your health) at old St Bride's immortal charms.

GAVIN ROSS

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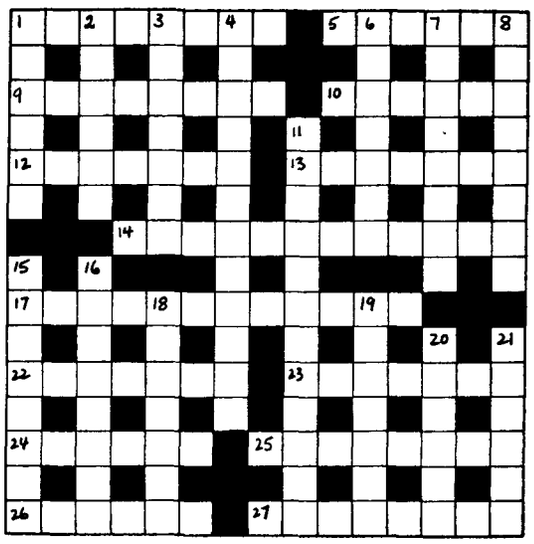
Weekend Crossword 1524

PRIZE: £10 Book Token for the first correct solution opened. Entries to Crossword 1524, New Statesman, 14-16 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU by first post 22 July.



Name.....

Address.....

.....

ACROSS

1. Scraps in which there is one favourite among the certainties (8)
5. Raced round a part of London and committed robbery (6)
9. The ordinary person features superbly in a return call (8)
10. Fails to make a hit with the ladies (6)
12. Leave inside a part of the book as a reduction to absurdity (7)
13. Soldier who is made bright in expectation (7)
14. Clear means of communication for big landlords? (5,7)
17. Travelled around outside the home in turning venerable (12)
22. A sage is used as a weapon (7)
23. Record speed for a state? (7)
24. Back light with tax return inside — how original! (6)
25. Moderate lover embraces one with a touch (8)
26. Reveal a study on what may be due (6)
27. Flower as a festive decoration (8)

DOWN

1. Observe a tool go up and down (6)
2. Attractive headgear has this arctic feature inside (6)
3. Details of wages given when town enters election (7)
4. This plant makes business scarce and the road is up (12)
6. Dog which has to beat the favourite (7)
7. Occupations for the period included in the permit (8)
8. Scatter when red spies go into hiding (8)
11. The collector puts mine in unusual formation all round the high ground (12)
15. Page included in back leaves when bound (8)
16. It is issued for an oriental embassy (8)
18. Rider looking gaunt (7)
19. Building which will do for the editor although definitely not heated (7)
20. Used in war it makes one of us return without a friend (6)
21. It is superficial, but it brings the end of the war close, by the sound of it (6)

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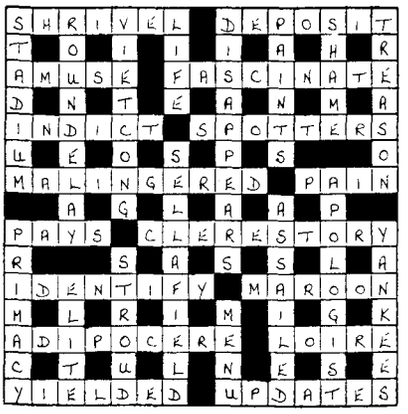

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HEARTSEARCH CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

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HEARTSEARCH

Cont'd from p.37

MALE, INTELLIGENT, caring with sense of humour, in or near London, sought by good looking female researcher, 41. Interests: films, countryside, conversation, green politics. Photo appreciated and returned. Box (28)3367. N28.19

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OVER EXPOSED
WANDA GOLDMAN
I'VE NOT BEEN SO EMBARRASSED IN YEARS
WELL WEDDINGS CAN OFTEN BE DIFFICULT
JADE HAS ENDURED A VERY TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE
I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT ANYONE THERE HAD DISCOVERED MY SEXUAL ORIENTATION
WHEN YOU'D BOUGHT THAT NICE, NEW DRESS AND REAL SHOES!
WHAT HAPPENED ?
IT WAS THE PHOTOGRAPHER... HE KEPT SAYING DON'T SAY CHEESE SAY LESBIAN

CHESS

SETTING TRAPS is sometimes thought of as a manifestation of a low cunning incompatible with correct play. However, most creative ideas involve some sort of trap, broadly conceived as the provocation of a plausible but faulty piece of thinking. Tartakower's remark that 'the mistakes are all there, just waiting to be made' is well known. I prefer a more active motto — the traps are all there just waiting to be sprung.

To start with a simple, even primitive, example, consider the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez: **1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Bxc6**. Most people play 4 . . . dxc6 here without a second thought, but the other recapture is well worth considering. Its viability depends on a trap: **4 . . . bxc6 5. d4 exd4 6. Qxd4 Qf6 7. e5 Qg6 8. 0-0 Bb7 9. e6 fxe6 10. Ne5.** It looks as if White has a decisive double attack against g6 and d7 . . . **Qxg2 + ! 11. Kxg2 c5 +** and Black wins back the Queen with two extra pawns.

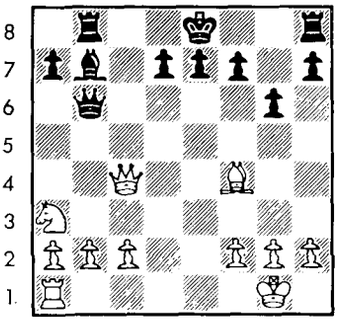
Of course the most interesting and useful traps in the opening are likely to be ones that somebody is keeping secret. There are, however, some traps which have so compelling a lure that they continue to take a steady supply of fresh victims. One such occurs in the Queen's Gambit Accepted after **1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. e3 e6 5. Bxc4 c5 6. 0-0 a6 7. a4 Nc6 8. Qe2 Qc7 9. Nc3 Be7 10. Rd1 0-0**. All very reasonable so far. Now what does White want to do next? Develop his Queen's Bishop, of course, and the natural way of doing this is by advancing e3-e4. Natural, but very bad since after both **11. e4 Ng4!** and **11. dxc5 Bxc5 12. e4 Ng4!** White has to resort to desperate measures to prevent the arrival of a Black Knight on d4 from causing a nasty accident on h2. White can avoid the snare by playing 11. b3 or 11. h3.

By now sneering comments about 'superficial cheapos' can be expected. I reply, firstly: so what? Pre-game preparation is mostly that. And, secondly, that the real point of the trap is to exclude what would otherwise be desirable for the opponent. To illustrate this point I progress to what is really a very subtle trap directed against a would-be equalising manoeuvre. Once again the QGA is the hunting ground, though this time it is White who is the trapper: **1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Qa4 + Nbd7**. It's hard to imagine that there can be anythig wrong with this move, but in order to steer well clear of what follows Black might prefer 4 . . . c6 or 4 . . . Nc6. **5. Nc3 e6 6. e4 c5?!** This is clearly the way in which Black would like to challenge White's centre, and if there were nothing better than 7. Bxc4 cxd4 8. Nxd4 Bc5 it would equalise. **7. d5! exd5 8. e5 d4 9. Bxc4 dxc3 10. exf6 Qxf6 11. Bg5 Qc6** The victim supposes that White has to do something about the position of his Queen. **12. 0-0-0!** At this moment in the game Taimanov-Polugaievsky, USSR Ch. 1960 Black saw what was in store if he took the Queen and tried to escape with 12 . . . cxb2+ 13. Kxb2 Be7 14. Rhel f6. Taimanov still won quickly after 15. Bb5 Qb6 16. Kc1! But the thematic conclusion had been seen a quarter of a century before in a simultaneous game in Vienna: **Qxa4 13. Rhe1 + Be7 14. Rxe7 + Kf8 15. Rxf7 + Kg8 16. Rfxd7 + Qxc4 17. Rd8 + Kf7 18. Ne5 + Ke6 19. Nxc4** and wins.

So not all traps are swindles. Nor is the distinction merely the bias of 'I set traps, you're a dirty swindler'. There will always be a point at which a trap can be avoided. But when a trap really is worth setting, the detour around it will force the opponent into a trek across adverse terrain.

Problem

Who's trapping who in this position after **1 . . . Qxb2 2. Rb1**?



Solution

White is the victim after **2 . . . Qxb1 + 3. Nxb1 Ba6!** From Johansson-Mezing, Berlin 1973.

George Botterill

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This England

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☐ Oxford's Labour councillors have voted to drop the Latin tag from the city's coat of arms as there are now more people in Oxford who understand English than Latin. The coat, which contains a doleful looking ox with the words 'Fortis est Veritas' was donated to the city in 1574 by Queen Elizabeth I. The Labour group is holding out for a 'happy ox with a smile on its face.' — *Daily Telegraph* (George Moor)

☐ The chairwoman of the group of Tory ladies he had come to address introduced him with these words: 'We offer an especially warm welcome to Mr Mackay tonight, since he has refused to accept any payment for his appearance. This means that we will be able to afford a proper speaker next time.' — *Sunday Express* (R. H. Mann)

☐ A swear box at the Black Swan in Stoke Bishop, Bristol, has raised £46.20 for charity from regulars discussing England's World Cup game with Argentina. — *Daily Telegraph* (G. M. Moger)

☐ Are you a political animal? No. I am a Tory supporter. I believe in the mixed economy. — *The Times* (Roger Opie)

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LOW PAY

Sheffield Council

A quarter of South Yorkshire's workforce earn less than £100 a week – and a staggering sixty per cent of full-time women workers in the county are low paid.
That's why Sheffield City Council – now by far the biggest city employer as manufacturing jobs vanish – has given its work on low pay some priority.
Initiatives now underway reflect the Council's desire to improve job quality for its own workforce as well as using its influence on the private sector.

■ Pay

A pay supplement is being phased in for the council's 8,000 low paid workers.
This makes up a percentage of the difference between actual earnings and the Low Pay Unit's wage threshold.
NUPE estimates that over 70 per cent of its 2,800 council members now benefit from the scheme – three quarters of them are women.

■ Take 10

This paid educational leave scheme is aimed at city council workers with no post-school education.
The course is designed to increase knowledge of how the council works, boost self-confidence and better equip people for participation in decision making.

■ Ideas

In an imaginative bid to improve jobs and defend services the council has taken steps to enable its own workers to have their say.
Groups of manual and clerical workers – in a variety of departments – have produced detailed plans to defend their jobs by improving employment quality and service delivery.

■ Retail

Focussing on women in retailing, the council-funded Low Pay Campaign aims to make sure shopworkers are paid at least their minimum entitlement.
The campaign also encourages union membership and highlights the economic and individual problems posed by low pay.

Low pay is on the increase – cutting purchasing power and eroding the local economic base.
Low pay contributes to many evils – housing stress, social problems and deepening poverty.
Low pay is unjust. Follow Sheffield City Council's example by promoting practical policies to combat it.

Working for better jobs

Department of Employment and Economic Development, (NT)
Palatine Chambers, Pinstone Street,
Sheffield S1 2HN
0742 755215 for more information

LOW PAY

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